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Workshop 15

A Colonial Sea: The Mediterranean, 1798-1956

directed by

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Workshop abstract

The workshop will explore the modern Mediterranean as a Colonial Sea. We will reconstruct colonial interactions, relationships, entanglements and shared experiences between Europe, the Maghreb and the Middle East from late 18th century, when the European colonization of the Mediterranean began, until the erosion of the imperial order in the 1950s¹. By bringing together research on colonial histories on both sides of the Mediterranean we wish to get away from a Eurocentric perspective which studies colonialism merely in a one-way direction from the metropoleis to the colonies. By stressing the ambivalences and paradoxes of colonialism, we want to overcome the shortcomings of modernization theory. We will investigate cultural, economic, political and social aspects of Mediterranean colonialism such as representations of the Mediterranean, colonial conquest, rule and administration; migration, settlement and trade; the social reality and cultural complexity of colonial cities and places. By combining comparative and transnational perspectives, asking for differences, similarities and entanglements we wish to avoid the ‘methodological nationalism’ of colonial histories in the Mediterranean. Similar to the ‘thalassological’ approach introduced by Horden and Purcell, we look for a history *of* the colonial Mediterranean, rather than for histories *in* the colonial Mediterranean. Instead of taking ‘the Mediterranean’ for granted, we will investigate how it was constructed and used as a concept for the colonization of Northern Africa and the Middle East. In this respect the workshop will also historicize Mediterranean studies and highlight their colonial past.

i The (late) ‘modern’ colonization of the Mediterranean started with Napoleon’s expedition in Egypt (1798) and continued with the British colonization of Malta and the Ionian Islands. This starting point was promoted after all by Edward Said who saw in Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt the beginnings of processes that dominated historical and contemporary perspectives of the ‘East’ and West and of the Mediterranean specifically. We thus tentatively set the chronological parameters of the research agenda at the end of 18th century with Napoleon’s advent to Egypt and at the end of the Napoleonic wars that saw the major expansion of British power in the Mediterranean until the middle of the twentieth century when the nationalist uprisings and movements were well under way and soon gave rise to independent post-colonial states. It was after 1815 especially that the Eastern Mediterranean started becoming a British Sea with areas under the direct or indirect rule of British imperial power. As the nineteenth century progressed up until the period after the First World War, European involvement in the Mediterranean was more extensive than ever before. The period saw, in chronological order, the British colonization of Malta (1802), the British Protectorate of the Ionian Islands (1815-1864), the British purchase of Cyprus (1878), the British occupation of Egypt (1882) and the British mandate in Palestine (1920). France’s expansionist project concentrated initially on the Western Mediterranean / North Africa, unfolding with the conquest of Algiers (1830), the establishment of protectorates over Tunisia (1881) and East Morocco (1912) and the mandates over Lebanon and Syria (1920). Spain’s engagement started with Spanish-Moroccan War (1859/60), followed by a first wave of settlers to Morocco and with the protectorate over Northern Morocco (1912). Italian colonial expansion to the Mediterranean started with Libya (1911) and continued with the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese (1912-1948). The incident of the bombardment of Corfu and the brief occupation of the island in 1927 was the first case that demonstrated the limits of the League of Nations when Mussolini completely ignored the international community and could be seen in the same light of Italian colonial expansion. The imperial order was challenged and eroded by anti-colonial Pan-Arabian and nationalist movements since the Interwar Period. It was destroyed in the 1950s by the Algerian War (1954-1962), the Suez Crisis (1956) and the independence of Libya (1951), Morocco and Tunisia (1956), and finally the independence of Cyprus from the United Kingdom in 1960.

Workshop description

Historians have repressed or played down the colonial aspects of European history for a long time. Recent debates on postcolonial theory and global history, and the growing influence of non-Western scholars have brought colonialism on top of the agenda of historical research. The *new* colonial history wishes to overcome universalist assumptions and traditional dichotomies of ‘colonizers’ and ‘colonized’, ‘active’ centres and ‘passive’ peripheries, which were typical for modernization theories. It is in search for non-Eurocentric representations of the colonial past that consider the ambivalences of colonialism and the agency of the indigenous.¹ We will apply this new approach to the colonial past of the modern Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean has been a Colonial Sea since ancient times, “it was the first sea to be colonized”.² While historians of the ancient and medieval world have advanced their insights into the Mediterranean as a field of study and as an analytical category, modern historians still seem to be under the influence of Fernand Braudel on the one hand³ and the widespread fragmentation of national and regional studies on the other, including important contributions on the colonial history of North Africa and the Middle East.⁴ Another strand of literature has associated the advent and departure of colonial rule with the advent of modernization in the Middle East.⁵ Since the 1970s and

1 See, e.g., SEBASTIAN CONRAD/SHALINI RANDERIA (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt 2002; FREDERICK COOPER, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley 2005.

2 KÄREN WIGEN, *Oceans of History. Introduction*, *American Historical Review*, 111, 3, 2006, 718. On ancient and medieval Mediterranean colonialism see PEREGRINE HORDEN/NICHOLAS PURCELL, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford 2000; PETER FELDBAUER et al. (eds.), *Mediterraner Kolonialismus. Expansion und Kulturaustausch im Mittelalter*, Essen 2005.

3 FERNAND BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949. Braudel's Mediterranean was to a large extent determined by the physical setting, the geographical and human space; while this analysis provided the foundations for an impressive number of studies, the modern colonial era differs significantly from Braudel's Mediterranean of the 16th century. We will attempt to move away from Braudel's schema that gave a new identity to the Mediterranean but may also have engulfed and circumscribed it too rigidly. Braudel's model does not fit with the period we are considering. In our timeframe, the stasis often characterizing Braudel's Mediterranean is very difficult to sustain. The late modern Mediterranean world was anything but immobile. Braudel's concept of Méditerranée was influenced by the ‘colonial School’ at the University of Algiers between 1923 and 1932. See ERATO PARIS, *La genèse intellectuelle de l'œuvre de Fernand Braudel. La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe I (1923-1947)*, Thèse nouveau régime EHESS, Paris 1997, 1-65, 90-126.

4 Parts of these studies have directly associated the history of colonial Mediterranean with the rise of nationalism: J.R. COLE, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Princeton 1993; KEITH DAVID WATENPAUGH, *Being Modern in the Middle East. Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton 2006; JAMES GELVIN, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of the Empire*, Berkeley 1998.

5 The approaches have ranged from less critical ones, employed during the height of the modernization theory paradigm to more critical ones that engage with the concept and the process without a priori formed celebratory narratives of modernization. See WILLIAM R. POLK/RICHARD L. CHAMBERS (eds.), *Beginnings of*

the work of Albert Hourani, it has been asserted that if the impact of Western/European influence had not been as severe as it came to be, the Middle East and North African Ottoman regions would have created and followed their own path to modernity.⁶

At the moment there is little consensus over when this modernity began and how ‘colonial’ or ‘global’ it was; however there seems to be a growing assertion that processes such as the integration of the Mediterranean region into the world market, the link with the Indian Ocean after the opening of the Suez canal, the emergence of new social groups, decentralization, land commoditization and the emergence of bureaucratic states and of civil society, which may have already started before the twentieth century, were significantly accelerated under the influence of European colonial powers.⁷

By bringing together research on colonial histories on both sides of the Mediterranean we will try to overcome a Eurocentric perspective which studies the impact of colonialism in a one-way direction according to a top-down-model: from the *metropoleis* to the colonies. We will analyze micro (islands) and macro (lands) regions that fell under European colonial power as well as the effects of colonialism on Southern Europe. By stressing the ambivalences and paradoxes of colonialism, we wish to overcome the shortcomings of modernization theory. By choosing a transnational approach we wish to avoid the ‘methodological nationalism’ of national colonial histories and “cut across the political divisions that have shaped traditional history”. Similar to the ‘thalassological’ approach introduced by Horden and Purcell, we look for a history *of* the colonial Mediterranean, rather than for histories *in* the colonial Mediterranean.⁸ We will combine comparative and transnational perspectives, asking for differences, similarities and entanglements with regard to four crucial dimensions of Mediterranean colonialism:

a) *Representations*: The modern colonization of the Mediterranean was deeply influenced by discursive and visual representations of the Mediterranean. Military conquest was accompanied and supported by scientific exploration. Geopolitical concepts like *Méditerranée* and *Mare nostrum* described the Mediterranean as an essentially European (French, Italian or Spanish) space, usurped by

Modernization in the Middle East, Chicago 1968; SHMUEL N. EISENSTADT, ‘Convergence and Divergence of Modern and Modernizing Societies: Indication from the Analysis of the Structuring of Social Hierarchies in Middle Eastern Societies’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 8, 1, 1977: 1-27.

6 DROR ZE’EVI, “Back to Napoleon? Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East”, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 19, 1 (2004), 73-94.

7 Other approaches that have looked at the impact of colonial rule and/or modernization on the North Africa and Middle Eastern societies have focused more on the lands than on the sea. AFAF LUTFI AL-SAYYID-MARSOT, ‘The British Occupation of Egypt from 1882’, in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. III, Oxford 1999, 651-664; TIMOTHY MITCHELL, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge 1988; Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, Berkeley 2001; KEITH DAVID WATENPAUGH, *Being Modern in the Middle East. Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton 2006; JAMES GELVIN, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of the Empire*, Berkeley 1998.

8 PEREGRINE HORDEN/NICHOLAS PURCELL, ‘The Mediterranean and “the New Thalassology”’, *American Historical Review*, 111, 3, 2006, 723. On the ‘in/of’-distinction see *ibid.*, 730-2. For the concept of thalassology, see also, EDWARD PETERS, ‘Quid nobis cum pelago? The New Thalassology and the Economic History of Europe’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXXIV: I, 2003, 49-61,

Arabs and Muslims. Archaeologists, cartographers, geographers, geologists and historians legitimated this imperialist ideology by their scientific research. Racial theorists, anthropologists and intellectuals nurtured it with visions of a vital and virile Mediterranean race.⁹ At the same time, politicians, artists, mass media, and the growing tourist industry described South European (i.e. Mediterranean) regions like Andalucia, the Midi and the Mezzogiorno as archaic and exotic, Oriental and African and excluded them from Europe. In the 20th century anthropologists, political scientists and historians created the image of a static Mediterranean culture, defined by family and clan structures, absent of civil society and resistant to processes of modernization.¹⁰ We invite potential participants to investigate these ambiguous representations of the Mediterranean from late 18th to mid 20th century. In this respect the workshop will also historicize Mediterranean studies and highlight their colonial past.

b) *Politics*: ‘Classical’ themes of colonial history and post-colonial studies, such as power, collaboration and resistance, did not have the same following in the history of the Mediterranean and did not produce the quantity and quality of work that exists for British colonialism in India. In addition to that studies of modern history have explored the colonizing of Mediterranean regions mainly as a piece-meal and regional phenomenon, mostly determined by the priorities of colonizers’ headquarters in the capitals of European nation-states. Yet colonial encounters were far more complex. The workshop will explore them in a more balanced, nuanced way and in a comparative perspective. In 19th century, the southern littoral of the Mediterranean became a target and object of European conquest and rule. State-run campaigns of warfare and settlement tried to establish European ‘monopolies of power’ over North Africa and the Middle East. Under different forms of rule (protectorate, mandate, and colonial government) the Mediterranean was colonized. However, the implementation of French, British, Italian and Spanish state power was limited by local resistance, softened by compromise and cooperation with local elites and hindered by pre-existing power structures. While there are some studies that have dealt with these themes in North Africa and the Middle East there is no comparative study of the reactions to different forms of colonial rule around the Mediterranean. How did imperial regimes and local actors manage their difficult situations? How much coercion, compromise and cooperation was necessary for the politics of Empire in the Mediterranean?

c) *Economy*: Despite its Orientalist representation the modern Mediterranean was a very dynamic area. Colonialism provoked an intense circulation of money, goods, steamships and human-beings (entrepreneurs, merchants, migrants, sailors, settlers, workers) across the sea. Colonial economy had

9 See, e.g., PATRICIA LORCIN, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping and Race in Colonial Algeria*, London 1995; MARIE-NOËLLE BOURGUET et al. (eds.), *L’invention scientifique de la Méditerranée. Égypte, Morée, Algérie*, Paris 1998; DANIEL NORDMAN, ‘La Méditerranée dans la pensée géographique française (vers 1800-vers 1950)’ in CLAUDE GUILLOT et al. (eds.), *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, Wiesbaden 1998, 1-20.

10 These aspects have mainly been studied from a national perspective. For Italy see JANE SCHNEIDER (ed.), *Italy's ‘Southern question’. Orientalism in one country*, Oxford 1998; JOHN DICKIE, *Darkest Italy. The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900*, New York 1999; NELSON MOE, *The view from Vesuvius. Italian culture and the southern question*, Berkeley 2002. For a critique of the ‘Mediterraneanism’ that anthropologists often commit by reproducing stereotypes see, MICHAEL HERZFELD, ‘The horns of the Mediterraneanist dilemma’, *American Ethnologist*, 11, 3, 1984, 439-454.

strong effects on the hinterland of port cities on both sides of the Mediterranean which are hardly explored.¹¹ Alexandria, Algiers, Barcelona, Beirut, Corfu, Genova, Haifa, Marseille, Nicosia and Palermo can serve as examples and case studies of Mediterranean cities that developed during the period of colonial rule and papers examining the impact of colonialism on regional urban development would be most welcome; the rise of Haifa and Beirut at the expense of Aleppo and Damascus as the colonial powers prioritized the Mediterranean ports is for example a process worth investigating.¹² Was that an overall Mediterranean phenomenon or was there something particular in colonized areas that shaped their urban development from inland to coastal areas, a process reversed soon after the end of the colonial period? We are looking for papers that question whether port cities did form the entry points of colonial expansion and assess how much colonialism really penetrated the rural hinterland, during the 19th and 20th century. We would also like participants to engage with recent arguments on the ‘new thalassology’, defined as “typologies of harbours or routes, densities of port cities or maritime confederations, the penetration of economic networks by valuable seaborne goods, patterns in the recruitment of seafarers, or technological innovations in transport”.¹³ Equally interesting is the economic impact of colonization; the creation of mandate states created barriers to trade where they did not exist before and transformed a regional economy into small national ones.¹⁴ Did it also shift the direction and function of each respective economy under different European rule to the imperial centre?

d) *Culture*: Colonialism was usually based on racist assumptions and defined by practices of ‘racial’ discrimination and segregation. However it also created ‘mixed’ constellations. Mediterranean

11 The exception is made by histories of port cities of the Eastern Mediterranean that to some extent constitute a research sub-field of its own, focusing recently on the hailed cosmopolitanism of these ports. Recent studies include: RESAT KASABA et al., ‘Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities and Their Bourgeoisies: Merchants, Political Projects and Nation-States’, *Review*, X, 1, 1986, 121-135 and CAĞŞAR KEYDER et al. (eds.), ‘Port-Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, 1800-1914’, *Review*, XVI, 4, 1993; EVRIDIKI SIFNEOS, ‘“Cosmopolitanism” as a Feature of the Greek Commercial Diaspora’, *History and Anthropology*, 16, 1, 2005, 97-111; especially, MALTE FUHRMANN, ‘Meeresanrainer – Weltenbürger? Zum Verhältnis von hafentstädtischen Gessellschaft und Kosmopolitismus’, in *Comparativ*, ‘Hafenstädte: Mobilität, Migration, Globalisierung’ 2, 17, 2007: 12-26; MARK MAZOWER, *Salonika, City of Ghosts. Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950*, London 2004; MICHAEL J. REINER, ‘Colonial Bridgehead: Social and Spatial Change in Alexandria, 1850-1882’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 20, 4, 1988, 531-553, and DANIEL PANZAC, ‘Alexandrie: Evolution d’ une ville cosmopolite aux XIXe siecle’, *Annales Islamalogiques*, XIV, 1978, 195-215; MICHAEL J. REIMER, ‘Ottoman Alexandria: The paradox of decline and the reconfiguration of power in eighteenth-century Arab provinces’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 37 (1994), 107-146.

12 Other examples could include the social and economic development of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in Lybia under Italian colonial rule; see, ALI ABDULLATIF AHMIDA, ‘State and Class Formation and Colloaboration in Colonial Lybia’ in RUTH BEN-GHIAT/MIA FULLER (eds), *Italian Colonialism*, New York 2005, 59-71, and in the same volume, FEDERICO CRESTI, ‘The Early Years of the Agency for the Colonization of Cyrenaica (1932 – 1935)’.

13 HORDEN/PURCELL, *Mediterranean*, 739.

14 NADINE MEOUCHY/PETER SLUGETT, ‘Introduction’, in Ead. (eds), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, Leiden & Boston 2004, 1-20.

colonialism provoked a massive two-way-migration from North to South and vice versa that generated the formation of diaspora communities and blended littoral populations. Migration patterns suggest that among Europeans Italians, Greek, Maltese, Spaniards and French were the most mobile groups in the Mediterranean and migration could certainly form a part of the workshop's research agenda. What impact did this little-studied Mediterranean migration have on the development of regional identities and the emergence of new social hierarchies in Southern Europe and in the colonies, where the 'less than European – more than native' immigrants were often used in the civil service and white collar jobs or local merchants who were protected by colonial powers in the multi-ethnic ports of the Mediterranean much to the resentment of local elites?¹⁵

Colonial culture was also defined by hybridity. Settler colonialism and colonial urbanism had their own 'cultural logic'. As zones of contact and mixture colonial places (e.g. bazaars, brothels, churches and ports) provoked practices of coexistence, cooperation and negotiation that merged 'European' and 'non-European' culture.¹⁶ Mediterranean colonialism produced hybrid identities, individuals (e.g. *zuaves*, *harkis*, *pieds-noirs*, children of 'mixed' marriages) and cultural practices (e.g. in music, art, food, architecture) which transcended and partly subverted racist assumptions and dichotomies of colonial discourse.¹⁷ Papers are invited to investigate this modern colonial culture of the Mediterranean.

Potential Participants

Potential participants are PhD students, Postdoctoral fellows and senior scholars dealing with the colonial history of the Mediterranean: historians of/from Southern Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East with a local, regional, national and transnational focus on the political, cultural, social and economic aspects of colonialism. In most of the cases individual expertise will be focussed on specific regions and aspects. However, we hope that the 'thalassological' approach will inspire everybody to refer to the Mediterranean as a space and as an analytical category.

The workshop will combine macro and micro perspectives. Papers should contribute to a history *of* the Mediterranean (rather than to histories *in* the Mediterranean). They can focus on one littoral of the Mediterranean (i.e. Southern Europe, North African, Middle East), on connections and maritime routes between the shores, or on the entire Mediterranean (esp. with regard to the representation of

15 On Fascist campaigns to promote colonial settlement in Libya see CLAUDIO SEGRÉ, *Fourth Shore. The Italian colonization of Libya*, Chicago 1974. On the massive Maghrebinian migration from Algeria to France see CHARLES-ROBERT AGERON, *Modern Algeria. A History from 1830 to the Present*, London 1990, 78. See JULIA CLANCY-SMITH, *The Maghrib and the Mediterranean World in the Nineteenth Century: Illicit Exchanges, Migrants, and Social Marginals*, in: MICHAEL LE GALL/KENNETH PERKINS (ed.), *The Maghrib in Question. Essays in History and Historiography*, Austin 1997, 222-249.

16 The existence and role of large number of Christians in the Middle East and Syria in particular may have been significant and enable historians to avoid the one-dimensional view of the colonization of this region of the Mediterranean.

17 See, e.g., the excellent case study of DAVID PROCHASKA, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bone, 1870-1920*, Cambridge 1990.

the Mediterranean); they can be based on case studies (e.g. of port-cities or colonial *metropoleis* and their hinterland) or they can have a comparative or transnational design. They can explore cultural, economic, political, and/or social issues of colonialism such as the representation of the Mediterranean in political or scientific discourse, in mass media and tourist industry; colonial conquest, rule and administration; migration, settlement, economy, infrastructure and trade; port-cities, colonial culture and urbanity. In any case papers should try to develop a Mediterranean perspective, i.e. contextualize and link their respective fields and subjects of research with other Mediterranean regions and discuss transnational and comparative dimensions of the issue.