



**Workshop 10**

***Adriatic Frontiers: Communications Across Cultures, Space and Time***

**directed by**

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***Workshop abstract***

The workshop “Adriatic Frontiers: Communications Across Cultures, Space and Time” seeks to provide a forum for the study of the multi-faceted history of a region that has remained on the margins, despite the increased interest in the Mediterranean. Although Fernand Braudel had early upheld the study of interactions of Catholic, Muslim, Christian Orthodox, and Jewish cultures on either side of political borders as a promising field of study, few efforts have been made since then for a greater understanding of the Adriatic, specifically, as an intercultural space. This zone of multiple frontiers has suffered from the fact that it is also on the periphery of specializations of Ottoman/Middle Eastern, Italian/European, and Balkans/South Slavic histories, their respective sources and literatures. Scattered efforts in recent scholarship, resulting in somewhat astonishing findings, have demonstrated that we are yet far from understanding the workings of this space between, broadly, the 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The proposed workshop seeks to bridge this gap by bringing together an international group of scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds who nonetheless share a common interest in intercultural aspects of the Adriatic space in the past. The proposed workshop will reframe earlier efforts in the quest to further future scholarship on the matter. The organizers strive to achieve a good mixture of established scholars who have already made a lasting contribution to the field and younger historians who would benefit from the meeting in their future endeavours.

## *Workshop Description*

Few would disagree with the assertion that it was Fernand Braudel who put the study of the Mediterranean on the map. Though his idea to study this vast and diverse region as one was novel in that he looked for common traits, “structures”, and as yet undetected connections, he still recognized that the Mediterranean was not one unified sea but a complex encompassing many seas. Of all these regions, he felt the Adriatic Sea to be “perhaps the most unified.” At the same time it provided, he was sure, “material for all the problems implied in a study of the Mediterranean as a whole.” While the Adriatic coastal regions for Braudel were the “sphere of a triumphant Italian culture”, or at least an “Italianism” (as in Ragusa), the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional make-up of the wider Adriatic region did not go unnoticed in his opus magnum either: “Here,” Braudel wrote, “eastern influence could already be felt and Byzantium lived on; elements which combined to give this frontier zone its own originality. Its Catholicism was a fighting religion, faced with a threatening Orthodox world up in the mountains and with the immense Turkish peril.”

Despite this fascinating image of the early modern Adriatic as a frontier zone, this region has enjoyed but a very marginal place in the scholarly study of the Mediterranean after Braudel. Archival sources abound, and it was, in passing, in Dubrovnik in 1934, that Braudel claimed to have first “seen” his 16<sup>th</sup>-century Mediterranean. (The correspondence there discovered by him contained, he later remembered, “none of the general observations on human behaviour and great men to be found in Venetian documents, but is full of the banal but useful details of everyday life.”) But few of the interactions between the Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Muslim, and Jewish agents and cultures in this frontier zone that we have come to know through more recent studies (indeed suggesting them to have been quite commonplace) have yet provided us with a framework more encompassing than that of Braudel who, as is well known (and sometimes criticized), focused on the homogenizing aspects. Was the Adriatic really merely a “North-South corridor,” as he suggested? Or might there be significant interactions between the Eastern and Western shores? Were the abovementioned groups really in constant opposition punctuated by occasional conciliation and tolerance, or were there even absolutely delineated cultural borders between them? Should centuries of coexistence perhaps really have resulted in a greater degree of intercultural exchange than we have imagined?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century, throughout which the Adriatic region was largely shared between two states, Italy and Yugoslavia, has perhaps become a more homogenous image than realities in the early modern age would predict. This period had witnessed a diverse array of players—not only Venice and the Ottoman Empire but also the Kingdom of Naples, the Papal States, Hungary, the Holy Roman Empire, the Ragusan Republic, etc.—who all had their own interests and often made pacts with each other against a third party, not necessarily according to religious or ethnic divide. In the sources we find groups like Morlachs, Uskoks, or Dulcignotes, which were major players in past events but today are hardly familiar. Representatives of all four confessional groups mentioned above lived and worked on both shores of the Mediterranean. Interaction went beyond the well-known Fondaco dei Turchi in Venice, the inn of the “Turkish” merchants (of which many really were Muslim Slavs from Bosnia, as we now know). Even in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Ancona, part of the domain of the Papal States, one could find not only Jews but also “mercanti Turchi et altri Maumetani.” And this commerce had impact beyond merely the exchange of goods: The commune of Split, for instance, owed its impressive development since the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the vibrant trade between the Serenissima and the Ottoman Balkans. For a briefer period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottomans had developed a trade port of their own, when the sultan had settled in Vlora/Avlonya/Valona (in present-day Albania) a number of Jewish incomers from Spain

“to promote commerce.” Next to this “Jewish Dubrovnik,” there was further north the pirate’s den of Ulcinj/Dulcigno/Ülgün. Though good connections to Tripolis in Africa came first, a fruitful link was later established with the new Habsburg port of Trieste. Once the two archrival empires had decided to work together to curb the threat of piracy, the feared Dulcignotes were turned into legitimate merchants. The study of the Adriatic, as both a *sine qua non* of the Mediterranean and as its own particular case, merits study for its lasting impact on history, from internecine strife to piracy to forced migration to international trade—all salient to the twenty-first century Adriatic and Mediterranean, as well.

While much of the pertinent scholarship, and perhaps largely deservedly so, has focused on commercial relations (which, of course, always had a cultural dimension), there are many hints at that contacts between individuals and groups of various ethnic and religious background went beyond the realm of business. On the eastern shore of the Adriatic and its hinterland one could discover, for instance, an Ottoman *bey* and a Venetian *conte* belonging to the same Dalmatian family. Catholic builders from the coast would be commissioned to build mosques in the Ottoman realms. In some of churches along the eastern coast, we find both a Catholic altar and an Orthodox Christian iconostasis. Even on the “violent” Ottoman-Habsburg-Venetian border there could emerge friendly relationships, with exchanges of gifts—often wine for the Muslims and silk for the Latins—and even blood brotherhood spanning the confessional divide. Finally, there was traffic to both directions for potential converts to Islam and Christianity respectively, looking for better lives after a fresh new start.

These are just several of the many instances that will help us better understand the situation in the Adriatic basin and culture(s) located there. While the older scholarship, focused on political-diplomatic relations between centres like Venice and Constantinople, largely failed to provide much insight on how “grand schemes” had an impact locally, it now seems that this Adriatic world needs to be reconstructed through “minor” episodes and encounters. As this frontier zone also finds itself on the frontiers of several diverse academic specializations, the proposed workshop seeks to bring together Ottomanists, Slavists-Balkanists, Italianists, and representatives of other disciplines—literature, art history, consumption studies—to present and discuss their recent research.

By re-defining the Adriatic as its own space, with its own internal dynamics and paradigms, rather than merely a contended region on the periphery of three different empires, we hope to advance scholarship on the region beyond its current historiographical limits. To this end, we will consider several questions in depth during the workshop. How did political-ethnic-confessional borders or frontiers impede—or allow—communication? How did people transfer (or not transfer) goods, services and ideas in the Adriatic and its littoral? What were the geographic and intellectual horizons of a person living in this region? What role, if any, is played by networks of local and international merchants, clerics, soldiers and artisans as agents of communication and change? How was public and private life negotiated by average men and women, acting as individuals as well as members of communities?

Participants are asked to submit an abstract of not more than 500 words to the website of the MRM by 1 July 2009. In your abstract, please include a brief description of your sources and how you plan to use them and explain how your approach and topic fit into the notion of Adriatic Frontiers. Participants will be notified by 1 August and a final programme made available in mid-September.

For questions about the content and format of the workshop, please email the directors:

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