

## Review

Biray Kolluoglu and Meltem Toksoz, Editors: *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 256 pages. ISBN 978-1-84885-127-6, \$95.00 (hardcover).  
Reviewed by Robert J. Pranger.

To appreciate the scholarly nature and ambitious scope of this book, it is best to begin by reading the first essay by the editors (both on the faculty of Bogazici University in Istanbul), "Mapping Out the Eastern Mediterranean: Toward a Cartography of Cities of Commerce"; then the second by Caglar Keyder of the same institution and also of the State University of New York, Binghamton, "Port-cities in the Belle Epoque"; and finally the last, "The Deep Structures of Mediterranean Modernity," by Edmund Burke III of the University of California, Santa Cruz. This approach sets the stage for an impressively exhaustive study — nine additional essays — of key Ottoman cities of commerce on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean since the sixteenth century.

In our age of globalization there is much to be learned from this history, not the least being its emphasis on space in a cartographic sense that transcends empires and nation-states as a kind of universe of cosmopolitan cities, all part of existing political entities but also providing more inclusive opportunities for human enterprise and interaction.

The authors are unanimous in their view that the Mediterranean has been, and still is to some extent, such a special space.

The editors recount a 2004 meeting in Berlin at the *Wissenschaftskolleg* where they were invited by the Institute of Advanced Study as part of the working group *New Approaches to the History of Merchant Cities in the Ottoman Empire and Its Successor States*. Their working group "was only one among many if one considers the large number of conferences and workshops, post-graduate research programs, and dissertations, *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21:3 Copyright 2010 by Mediterranean Affairs, Inc.

Robert J. Pranger is a private consultant with extensive experience in national security affairs. He was formerly associate/managing editor of *Mediterranean Quarterly*. 120 *Mediterranean Quarterly*: Summer 2010 articles and books on the Mediterranean cities of commerce in the nineteenth century, testifying to an explosion of interest in these spaces since the closing decade of the twentieth century." Some of this new scholarship on the Mediterranean, the editors say, has gone so far as to see the region "as an economic, cultural, and socio-political unity, but very little has been said on what made that unity last, from its inception per se in the sixteenth century to the first quarter of the last century." The latter consideration would become the focus of this book of essays, originating in Berlin and with a subsequent planning workshop in Beirut during the last days of 2004. Since then, the editor's note, Beirut "once again has become the stage of violent confrontation that makes us reconsider the historical possibility of the Mediterranean." However, they believe that "this collection is timely and necessary, precisely because world societies and politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century are over-ridden with the opportunities and risks that come with increasing global interdependencies and connectedness." There is no word about the funding for such an ambitious project as this one, although it would seem that the first meetings in Berlin

and then in Beirut might give the reader some indication, as would the fact that both editors and four other contributors are Turkish.

This book is about “the cities of commerce of the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean that have been spaces of links, networks, and riches, also awash by conflicts, wars, and boundary contestations . . . in the ever-expanding and ever-intensifying circuits of global exchange since the sixteenth century.” All of these cities were ruled by the Ottoman Empire at some point until its final collapse in World War I. Of primary interest are Algiers, Alexandria, Athens, Beirut, Cairo, Constanta, Izmir, Piraeus, Salonica (Thessaloniki), Tripoli, and Tunisia (Tunis). The expression “cities of commerce” instead of “port-cities” (Keyder’s phrase) is preferred by the editors:

“a juncture of space, class, community and political authority,” relatively autonomous from imperial suzerainty but with a “cosmopolitan attachment” to the rule of the state.

The book’s methodology is a “cartography that looks at the terrains themselves, rather than the forces contained in these terrains.” This “mapping” of the eastern and southern Mediterranean reveals the durability of the region as an interdependency of cities of commerce, despite changes: “Constancy is in the space . . . the city of commerce valorises this space, cosmopolitanism generates the city, and the extended community is the city’s fabric.” All the essays in this volume, each written from a different vantage point, “deal with this process of valorisation, making the Mediterranean visible through a cartographic analysis.”

What follows the introductory essay by the editors are essays on different aspects of the above valorisation: those cities in the nineteenth-century expansion of European economies; economic and ecological change in Ottoman power 1550 – 1850 (the complex subject of increasing European competition impressively analyzed by the late Faruk Tabak of Georgetown University, to whom this book is dedicated); maps and wars in the sixteenth century; architecture in Salonica, Alexandria, and Izmir; a cartography Reviews 121 of harbour construction; mental maps of two Palestinian newspapers in the late Ottoman period; illicit trade and the role of the Albanian; migration and acculturation on the two shores of the Aegean at the turn of the twentieth century; development of the lower Danube; and Izmir during the Great Depression. All the authors accept that constancy in space of what Burke in his concluding essay calls “the well-acknowledged deep structural historical unity of the Mediterranean” made visible in the cartographic analysis of its cities of commerce.

Burke’s essay, “The Deep Structures of Mediterranean Modernity,” deals with “two important facts (and their attendant interconnected historical narratives)” that have, until now, “prevented any effort to think the history of the modern Mediterranean as a whole: Islam and colonialism.” The latter problem has ended, as independent states now line all shores around the Mediterranean, but Islam has not. Yet both remain as “deeply etched fault lines” in the region. As modernity, via Europe’s colonial expansion, spread from the western and northern shores into the eastern and southern reaches of the Mediterranean in the nineteenth century, so did religion as a focal point of struggle.

“Eastern Mediterranean commercial cities proved unable to resist the drift toward polarization along religious lines,” Burke writes. In this respect, the fate of Salonica is emblematic of the broader situation.” With the collapse of the old Ottoman order in World War I, cosmopolitanism was left to

shift for itself in a myriad of nation-states, in some cases still problematic themselves. Burke's imagery of "deeply etched fault lines" does not seem an exaggeration: "The result is that the history of the Mediterranean continues to operate at two speeds, and the colonial past continues to shape the ways in which we understand the modern histories of the eastern and southern Mediterranean, of Turkey, the Balkans and the Arab Mediterranean."

Cities of the Mediterranean is no travel book conveniently located near the next flight to Athens departing from London or Paris. On the contrary, it not only is not readily available in a physical sense, it forbids easy access by the general reading public.

In a word, it will appeal primarily to an attentive and motivated audience, much like Mediterranean Quarterly itself. In neither case is the word Mediterranean used lightly. It requires careful mapping from many vantage points as well as great honesty about Burke's "well-acknowledged deep structural historical unity of the Mediterranean."

Mediterranean Quarterly consistently highlights important issues of conflict in the region, and yet Mediterranean specialists continue to bear witness to its "deep structural historical unity." Perhaps there is some explanation for what appears on the surface to be a paradox, and it is found in the last two paragraphs of the second essay in this book, "Port-cities in the Belle Epoque" by Caglar Keyder (bearing in mind that what Keyder calls "port-cities" are what the editors label "cities of commerce," or so it seems to me).

He notes: "Along with the empires themselves, however, port-cities were also added to the wreckage contemplated by the angel of history." Nationalism became the opposite of nineteenth-century world order, and "national territorial economies created their own 122 Mediterranean Quarterly: Summer 2010 potential for the accumulation of wealth." The inhabitants of port-cities found themselves absorbed into new national societies. In the late twentieth century, however, a new era of globalization prompted business in various nations to press for policies similar to "the market-embracing liberalism of the previous century." And it is precisely in this new era that "the history of port-cities, and especially of port-city autonomy" once again becomes relevant: "A rule-based globalization could connect with autonomous 'world cities' contained within the weak and unobtrusive shells of nation-states, with the latter becoming less ethnic and more civic." This has hardly come to pass at this time in our history. Nonetheless, Keyder concludes, "We debate newly minted concepts such as 'urban citizenship' and 'right to the city', with the full knowledge that they would have been much cherished by port-city denizens a century ago. And we indulge in an optimism that promises may yet be fulfilled the second time around."

And so the "well-acknowledged historical unity of the Mediterranean" remains a spatial project still incomplete rather than of antiquarian interest only. These contemporary cities of commerce filled with the same cosmopolitan energies found in the eastern and southern Mediterranean ports at the height of the Ottoman Empire may go by different names — New York, London, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and others — but nonetheless exemplify similar spatial characteristics vis-à-vis each other.

Is it any accident that Google, in its troubles with Chinese officials in Beijing, should move its search queries inside China to servers in Hong Kong, to some extent outside the reach of Chinese censors, even though the former British Crown Colony is now part of China as it continues its special — and perhaps increasingly difficult — status as a world commercial centre in the spirit of the "cities of the

Mediterranean?” As the editors of this volume remind us, “What reveals the durability of the unity of the eastern Mediterranean despite changes is the space . . . [the] city of commerce valorises this space, cosmopolitanism generates the city, and the extended community is the city’s fabric.” No more so in the Eastern Mediterranean of the Ottoman Empire than in the great commercial centres of East Asia today. Indeed, the Pacific rim has undergone, in this sense, its own “Mediterraneanization,” to which the United States has profoundly committed itself.

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