

## Mediterranean Mobilities and Borders

**Veranstalter:** DFG-network „A Modern Mediterranean: Dynamics of a World Region, 1800-2000“; European Institute, Istanbul Bilgi University; Orient-Institut Istanbul

**Datum, Ort:** 21.06.2018 - 24.06.2018, Istanbul

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The research network „The Modern Mediterranean: Dynamics of a World Region 1800[U+2502]2000“, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), aims to integrate the fragmented (local and regional, national and imperial, maritime and terrestrial) histories of the modern Mediterranean in order to better apprehend this entangled contact zone between Africa, Asia, and Europe. By organising a series of workshops on crucial aspects, the network brings together scholars and institutions that explore the modern history of the Mediterranean, as this field is still under-researched compared to the pre-modern era.<sup>1</sup> While the first meeting at the Centre for Mediterranean Studies of the Ruhr University Bochum in March 2018 (titled „Where Are We Now? Zur Verortung des modernen Mittelmeeres in Ort und Zeit“) had focused on the place of the Mediterranean in modern concepts of time and space (chrono-politics, area studies, and global history)<sup>2</sup>, the second conference took place at the Orient-Institut Istanbul (OII). The workshop brought together historians and art historians, anthropologists and sociologists, geographers and literary scholars from Western Europe, Turkey, and North America in order to engage critically with the modern mobilities of the region as well as with their different borders and barriers, whether economic, social, ethnic, legal, or political.

In her keynote lecture, VALESKA HUBER (Berlin) presented two different faces of the Suez Canal as a channel of communication (1869-1914). The traditional narrative presents the Canal as a breakthrough for steamship transport that allowed a rapid passage to India and brought Orient and Occident closer to each other. On the other hand, it blocked traditional modes of communication

and transportation, such as caravan routes and entailed new forms of mobility control, as well as disease control. Therefore, the construction of the Canal had an ambivalent impact on communication and mobility in the region and beyond. In her conclusion, Huber stressed that the Mediterranean should be connected to other maritime spaces and that historians should not only focus on connectivity, but also study borders.

This led directly to the heart of the workshop's programme, as explained by the organiser MALTE FUHRMANN (Istanbul), after a welcoming speech by MELIKE ŞAHİNOL (Istanbul): While the region saw mobility rising to an unprecedented scale with the advent of steamships, new regulatory and control mechanisms aimed to exploit, curb, and channel mobility. The interplay of these different processes and interactions was the focus of the workshop.

The first panel, titled „Avenues of Exploration in the Study of Mediterranean Interaction in History“, was opened by NORA LAFI (Berlin). She argued for a long-term study of Mediterranean migration from the fall of *al-Andalus* to the present humanitarian crisis. According to Lafi, the implementation of European concepts, such as „the nation“ or „ethnic-religious minorities“, had disastrous consequences on the multicultural and -religious societies of the Mediterranean region. Controversially discussed was the question whether the Ottoman Empire's management of diversity was so fundamentally different from that of European nation states. MURAT DAĞLI (Istanbul) explored the place of the Mediterranean in Turkish historiogra-

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<sup>1</sup>On the state of art of the history of the modern Mediterranean, see Manuel Borutta / Fabian Lemmes, *Die Wiederkehr des Mittelmeerraumes. Stand und Perspektiven der neuhistorischen Meditterranistik*, in: *Neue Politische Literatur* 58 (2013), no. 3, p. 389-419. On the research network „The Modern Mediterranean: Dynamics of a World Region 1800[U+2502]2000“ see: <https://modernmediterranean.net/> (20.02.2019).

<sup>2</sup>Part of the first meeting was a public panel with the historian Matthias Middell (Leipzig), the scholar of Islamic Studies Stefan Reichmuth (Bochum), and the anthropologist Martin Zillinger (Köln), organised by the network and the Centre for Mediterranean Studies focusing on the future of area studies in the age of global history. See: <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-36580> (18.12.2018).

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phy of the Ottoman Empire. Due to dominant Arabo-Muslim or Central Asian narratives, Mediterranean perspectives are rare within Ottoman and Turkish history, which often characterise multicultural Mediterranean port cities – such as late Ottoman Izmir / Smyrna – as „foreign“. Dağlı also highlighted how Ottoman historiography evolved within the social and political context since the foundation of the Turkish Republic and how academic research is more and more marginalised in favour of a popular historiography that is in tune with the identity politics of the current government.

The second panel was dedicated to „Late Ottoman Landscapes and Entanglements“. PAOLO GIRARDELLI (Istanbul) explored the establishment of Italians in Ottoman lands during the 19th century, going beyond the usual paradigm of trade as the central element of cultural contact. His talk described how some families, often stemming from the very same areas on the Italian peninsula, took root in their new environments and how their architecture formed public spaces, for example those in Alexandria. CEYHUN ARSLAN (Istanbul) examined the representation of the Mediterranean in late Ottoman travelogues. Notably *On the Way to Hajj (Hac Yolunda, 1909)* by Cenap Şahabettin (1870-1934), which recounts a ship voyage to Egypt by the late Ottoman doctor and writer, was used as an example. Arslan claims that the way the Mediterranean was presented as a hybrid and fluid space challenged the idea of a particular Ottoman cosmopolitanism. Although the author used numerous references to classical Arabic and Persian poetry, his knowledge did not help him to understand the street vendors in Cairo and Alexandria. İLAY ROMAIN ÖRS (Istanbul) presented her ethnographic research on the Greeks of Constantinople / Istanbul, who are sometimes referred to as „*rum polites*“ (Constantinopolitan Greeks, *İstambulullu Rum* or *Konstantinoupolites*), in a mixture of Turkish and Greek terms. She stressed the strong emotional attachment to the city, which can also be observed in the diaspora after 1955. Romain Örs underlined the diversity of this community, which was spread over aristocratic (Fener), bourgeois (Galata / Pera) and working-class (Tatavla)

neighbourhoods. Furthermore, she pointed to the fact that after the expulsion of Greeks from Turkey in 1955, despite their nostalgic feelings, their particular form of cosmopolitanism remained alive, and the diaspora community never succumbed to nationalism and revanchism. Finally, MATTHEW GHAZARIAN (New York) referred to communal boundaries in Eastern Anatolia and inquired why these boundaries, that had usually been fluid, became stricter during a time of increased mobility in the middle of the 19th century. He presented examples of fluid boundaries, such as shared sacred spaces between Muslims, Alevis and Christians and an Alevi song that praises an Armenian priest. With the beginning of the Tanzimat reforms in 1839, both the Ottoman government and community institutions such as the Armenian Patriarchate increased their efforts to strictly separate the communities. The discussion brought up the question whether these evolutions are part of a larger process that started much earlier.

The second day of the workshop began with the panel „Moving, Being Moved, or Stranded around the Mediterranean“ that brought together three papers focusing on different mobile actors: slaves, soldiers, and sailors. VERUSCHKA WAGNER (Istanbul) presented her research project on slaves from the Black Sea region in Istanbul in the 17th century. Slavery was an integral part of Ottoman society, with Black Sea slave trade equalling Atlantic slave trade in size in the 17th century. However, in contrast to the Americas, Ottoman slavery was non-capitalist and a rather „open system“, which allowed for spatial and social mobility, including mobility in legal status. Many slaves brought to Istanbul stayed there after their manumission instead of returning to their home regions; two former slaves even reached the highest echelons of the Ottoman administration. NICOLE IMMIG (Istanbul) reflected on „World War I and the Mediterranean“ as a new research field. She stressed that maintaining control in the Mediterranean was vital in World War I warfare and a huge – but often neglected – number of soldiers was shipped to the Mediterranean theatres of war. She then demonstrated the potential of the topic for historians of the Mediter-

anean by pointing to movements of soldiers, prisoners of war, and goods, intercultural encounters and perception of the other, dissemination of diseases, and disease control, the particular importance of islands – as places of hospitalisation and convalescence („nurses of the Mediterranean“) as well as places of exile and internment –, the construction of infrastructures, control regimes, and, thereby, the short- and long-term effects on those places. The war-related change of mobility regimes was also the central *problématique* of DANIEL TÖDT's (Berlin) paper, which focused on African seafarers stranded in Marseille during World War II as a case of a „Mediterranean im-mobility“. Linking Mediterranean to global history, the paper is part of a larger book project on African seamen in Marseille and Antwerp from 1880 to 1960. During the colonial age, the port city of Marseille was France's „gate to the Orient“, linking it not only to the Mediterranean but also to the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and sub-Saharan Africa. Tödt sketched the shifting mobilities of the seafarers from the Great Depression (with high unemployment, the influx of illegal seafarers, increasing control and new ways of identification) through mobilisation for war (especially forced mobilisation) to wartime immobilities (prisoners of war, restrictive immigration laws of the Vichy regime, repatriation plans). He thereby portrayed Marseille as a gateway and place of confinement alike.

The final panel dealt with „Flows and Blockages of Trans-Mediterranean Networks“ and was opened by FUNDA SOYSAL's (Istanbul) talk on the Istanbul Stock Exchange and the South African Gold Mining Speculation in 1895. Her project intends to make a contribution to global history, but, using the example of the banker Victor Misrachi, Soysal also revealed the economic significance of trans-Mediterranean networks and showed how the Ottoman stock exchange was tied to its European counterparts. She argued that the intertwining of local indigenous finance systems with world capital flows have not been sufficiently understood yet and that Istanbul could serve as a good case study to highlight the consequences of financial speculation in the 1890s. Taking as case studies

British Cyprus, the Italian Dodecanese, and the French Levant, ALEXIS RAPPAS (Istanbul) examined how Britain, France, and Italy built inter-imperial borders in the formerly Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean parts of their empires during the interwar period. He argued that (1.) in designing new nationalities, the imperial powers reacted above all to demands from local populations; and that (2.) the extent of jurisdiction they could exercise upon their new subjects, rather than borders traced over maps, represented the actual limits of their sovereignty. Finally, and most importantly for the topic of the workshop, he demonstrated that both the political and nationalist movements' „transnational“ cooperation and the colonial powers' practice of observing, and borrowing from, one another were important flows and mutual influences between the territories. ANDREAS GUIDI (Paris) outlined his planned post-doc project, in which he intends to study arms, drugs, and human trafficking in the Mediterranean from 1870 to 1945. Geographically the project will focus on Italian (possibly also Greek and North African) port cities. Adopting a translocal approach and taking the illegal and the illicit as fluid categories, it tries to establish networks of actors, but also takes into account international conferences and regulations.

The richness of approaches and perspectives was reflected by a long and productive Final discussion, stimulated by MANUEL BORUTTA's (Bochum) concluding remarks. Amongst the points made and questions raised, just a few shall be mentioned here: the idea of sea-faring empires as a Eurocentric idea; the multiplicity of languages as an obstacle to histories „of the Mediterranean“; the importance of both entanglements and disentanglements, of both mobilities and (new) borders to be considered; the relative silence on the Mediterranean in Ottoman studies as a consequence of the Ottoman trauma of having lost the Mediterranean; the post-colonial North African countries having omitted the Ottoman history when creating national narratives; the transformation of phenomena when they are implemented on other (local, national, regional, thalassic, global) scales; the Mediterranean as a contact zone, where interaction is to be considered as a reciprocal

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process, not only from the perspective of its Northern shore; the importance of the „hinterlands“; comparisons, whether synchronic or diachronic, remaining important tools for researching Mediterranean history.

Many papers showed that Mediterranean and global history are not at all opposed or mutually exclusive concepts but seem to be rather complementary and mutually enriching. As a contact zone, the Mediterranean region is a good subject to study European-non-European fluxes, entanglements and disentanglements. Incidentally, it might also be worthwhile for global historians to study the Mediterranean.

### Conference Overview:

#### *Opening Talk*

Valeska Huber (Free University Berlin): Channels of Communication: Connections and their Limits in the Suez Canal Region 1869-1914

Melike Şahinol (Orient-Institut Istanbul): Words of Welcome

Malte Fuhrmann (Istanbul Bilgi University): Introduction

*Section: Avenues of Exploration in the Study of Mediterranean Interaction in History*

Chair: Esther Möller (UniBw Munich / Leibniz Institute of European History, Mainz)

Nora Lafi (Leibniz Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin): Mediterranean Migration in Longue Durée Perspective

Murat Dağlı (Istanbul Bilgi University): From Early-Modern to Modern: Where is the Mediterranean in Ottoman Historiography?

*Section: Late Ottoman Landscapes and Entanglements*

Chair: Ufuk Adak (Altınbaş University)

Paolo Girardelli (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul): Migrating Eastward at the Threshold of Modernity. Perspectives on the Italian-Ottoman Contact beyond the Trading Paradigm

C. Ceyhun Arslan (Koç University, Istanbul): Theorizing the Mediterranean via Late Ottoman Travel Writings

İlay Romain Örs (Istanbul Bilgi University):

Cosmopolitan Enclaves Compared: Notes on Some Cultural Geographies in Istanbul

Matthew Ghazarian (Columbia University, New York / Orient-Institut Istanbul): Communal Boundaries in the Ottoman East

*Section: Moving, Being Moved, or Stranded Around the Mediterranean*

Chair: Jasmin Daam (University of Kassel)

Veruschka Wagner (Turkish-German University, Istanbul / SPP Transottomanica): Slaves of the Black Sea Region in Istanbul. Spatial and Social Mobility in the 17th Century

Nicole Immig (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul): World War I and the Mediterranean: Some Thoughts on a New Research Field

Daniel Tödt (Humboldt University, Berlin): Stranded in Marseille. Mediterranean Immobility and African Seafarers During World War II

*Section: Flows and Blockages of Trans-Mediterranean Networks*

Chair: Fernando Esposito (Tübingen University)

Funda Soysal (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul): Galata Going Global: The Istanbul Stock Exchange and 1895 South African Gold Mining Speculation

Alexis Rappas (Koç University, Istanbul): Building Interimperial Borders in the Eastern Mediterranean: Britain, Italy and France, 1920-1939

Andreas Guidi (EHESS, CETOBaC Paris): Translocal Networks on the Margins of International Law: Arms, Drugs, and Human Tracking in the Mediterranean Region, 1870-1945

*Conclusion and Final Discussion*

Manuel Borutta (Ruhr University Bochum)

*Planning of Upcoming Network Workshops*

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