

## BOOK REVIEWS

P. Peregrine and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. xiii + 761 pp. ISBN 0-631-13666-5.

In the Introduction to their book, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (H & P) explain the genesis, the title and the aim of their study: 'in his celebrated *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* ... Fernand Braudel had proclaimed the enduring unity and distinctiveness of his subject; but he had mostly confined his supporting evidence to what he thought of as the facts of geography and to sixteenth-century documents ... Our simple observation concerning *The Mediterranean* induced a simple question. Could such a work have been written taking as its eponymous ruler an imperial potentate from Antiquity or the Middle Ages? If the Mediterranean had indeed, as Braudel suggested, constituted a distinct unity in earlier centuries than the sixteenth, it ought to be possible to demonstrate the fact. It ought also to be possible to discover how that unity subsisted, and what kinds of continuity were involved in the process' (p. 1). H & P make a clear distinction, perhaps too rigid (I return to this at the end of this review) between 'history in the region ... and of it'. To the first belongs Mediterranean political, social, economic, or religious history *per se*, to the second 'history either of the whole Mediterranean or of any aspect of it to which the whole is an indispensable framework' (p. 2). Microecologies and their interrelations are essential for 'history of'; 'history in', by contrast, 'is not deterministically to be thought of as a mere by-product of' microecological setting, which is why they chose to omit it from their study (p. 2). In what follows H & P assert that 'When Mediterranean history is taken ... it is often narrowly conceived — as history in rather than of the region', and they claim that Braudel's great work is the only significant exception to that generalization. Although basically accepting Braudel's *longue durée*, they hurry to add that they have not followed his method uncritically, and that the unity of the Mediterranean Sea, based as it is on the long history of how it has been envisaged and on the allegedly scientific definition of the Mediterranean's physical geography, is precarious (p. 15). Great as their achievement may be judged, and it is well to bear in mind that the present book is only the first installment of a two-volume study, the programmatic assertions of H & P do not do full justice to a number of relevant studies that have appeared since the publication of Braudel's work, either under its influence or in critical reaction to it. Two examples will illustrate my point.

In the Foreword to the first issue of the *Mediterranean Historical Review* (1, 1986, 5-6), Shlomo Ben-Ami writes: 'this *Review* is the result of a conviction that the Mediterranean region is a legitimate subject of historical research and debate requiring little, if any, defence; it is inspired by a penchant for the landscape — physical and human — of the Mediterranean world ... In spite of the obvious differences in language, religion and the particular histories of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean basin, the structural unity and coherence of the region, and hence the comparable nature of the problems, cannot escape the attention of the student of history'. Ben-Ami goes on to pronounce that despite the connection between history and geographical space, 'the Mediterranean of the historian cannot be identical to that of the geographer. Rarely entirely autonomous, the close proximity to other regions and cultures has always exposed it to outside influences, just as Mediterranean civilizations have left their mark on remote lands'. The declared interest of the editors of the *MHR* 'in as wide a scope as possible — both in space and in time — of Mediterranean history' has been effectively achieved, and is amply and variously demonstrated, obviously not on the grand scale of the present study, in the volumes of *MHR* which have appeared, including papers dealing with history in the Mediterranean and of the Mediterranean, with local, regional and pan-Mediterranean histories, with immigration, colonization and imperialism, with the connections, mutual influences and disruptive forces between the Mediterranean and other 'Great Units', notably Europe and the Middle East.

My second example is R. King, L. Proudfoot and B. Smith (eds.), *The Mediterranean: Environment and Society*, London and New York 1997, a textbook for undergraduates (not mentioned by H & P, perhaps understandably). Not a few of the issues and problems discussed and investigated by H & P are recognized and surveyed in this book. According to R. King, in his introduction to the book, 'it is the multi-layered interactions between physical, cultural and contemporary social and economic geographies which define the essence of the Mediterranean landscape and Mediterranean life, and which make the littoral regions of the Mediterranean states cohere as a recognizable entity. ... The present volume attempts what none of the others [i.e. previous studies, including in particular Braudel's and O. Ribiero, *Il Mediterraneo: ambiente e tradizione*, Milan 1983, again not listed by H & P] achieve: a complete and integrated treatment of the various systematic geographies of the Mediterranean Basin, treating the whole region both as a unity and a diversity, and stressing the physical-human interactions which lie at the heart of a full geographical understanding of the area' (pp. 1-2). The difficulties encountered in defining and characterizing the Mediterranean and Mediterraneanism are lucidly and succinctly presented by King, who not only lists typical Mediterranean elements but also draws attention to variation and complexity in topographical, climatic, land, urban and other features (pp. 2-9). Anyone who has read King's introduction will probably find H & P's treatment of the question 'What is the Mediterranean?' (pp. 10-15) familiar, despite their more sophisticated approach to the subject and the concepts and examples they adduce, which of course are not to be expected in a textbook. One may also note that in the two chapters that deal with 'The Graeco-Roman Mediterranean' and 'The Mediterranean in the Mediaeval and Renaissance World' in the book of King *et al.*, Braudel's immense contribution to the understanding of the Mediterranean world is indeed acknowledged, and yet he is not followed slavishly, and the reader is duly reminded of the diversity, complexity, fragmentation and heterogeneity of the region, themes extensively probed by H & P.

It is unfair, however, to dwell pedantically upon such matters in reviewing this important study, which is thought-provoking and rich in insights. The human history of the Mediterranean world from the second millennium BCE to the late second millennium CE is thoroughly examined here, with topics and examples focusing mainly on the Graeco-Roman world and the Middle Ages, and the five parts of the work and the whole discussion are structured thematically, not chronologically. Earlier suggestions and conceptions concerning the unity in space and continuity over time of the Mediterranean — as well as of Europe and of the Middle East — are reviewed and criticized in Part One, which includes a critical assessment of the work and ideas of M.I. Rostovtzeff, H. Pirenne, S.D. Goitein and Braudel. The first three are regarded as too narrowly interactionist and charged with neglecting ecology, and all of them are said 'to have enlarged the concept of the "Romantic Mediterranean", giving new life to much of its central imagery' (p. 31). In contrast to Braudel, and to more recent scholars who have pursued and advocated the ecological, *scientific* approach to the study of history, H & P argue for a broader and more flexible ecological model in interpreting the history of the Mediterranean region (p. 45), for they are of the opinion that 'the dynamics and flux of social allegiances and ordered behaviour in the Mediterranean region will defy scientific modelling' (p. 49).

An extensive exposition of the characteristics of 'Four Definite Places' (the Biqa of Lebanon, South Etruria, the Green Mountain of Cyrenaica, and the small Greek island of Melos) serves to introduce the main subjects of Part Two: Microecologies, Ecology and the Larger Settlement, and Connectivity. It is argued that these four places, like Ravenna where Arnaldo Momigliano would go when he wanted to understand Italian history, exhibit what is normal for the history of the Mediterranean (p. 77). In contrast to the prime importance attributed by leading representatives of the 'Romantic tradition', notably Braudel, to *villes et routes* as constituting the essence of the Mediterranean past and its unity, H & P bring out and elaborate the concept of connectivity as pivotal for understanding the nature of and the conditions obtaining in the Mediterranean. The

larger settlement, that is cities and towns, is not a suitable category for treating the history of the Mediterranean and discerning its essence — first, because all theories that have been suggested to define and characterize what the city is (the central-place theory, the rank-size theory, the producer/consumer theory, etc.) are critiqued as suffering from various failures and hence as being inadequate; second, because towns, as well as routes, ‘can be seen as “epiphenomenal” to larger ecological processes’ (p. 90), an argument that H & P seek to demonstrate by showing that the hinterlands of towns are dispersed and changeable, not natural (pp. 112 ff.). In short, for H & P, ‘a town is an address, an arena, an architectonic agglomeration’, and is not distinctive for the way in which its microregions work (p. 90). Routes are not discredited as much as towns, only relegated to the status of a special instance of the larger phenomenon of connectivity, that is, ‘the various ways in which microregions cohere, both internally and also one with another — in aggregates that may range in size from small clusters to something approaching the Mediterranean’ (p. 123). Connectivity is dynamic, changeable and progressive; it includes the functioning of geography in relation to sound and sight, commercial transport, movement of people and dispersion of ideas, as well as land roads and particularly shipping lanes across and around the Mediterranean; in sum, it is the manifold facets of connectivity that unify the Mediterranean (p. 172).

The aim of Part Three, entitled *Revolution and Catastrophe*, is primarily to explain the working of the connectivity of microregions by examining the Mediterranean food systems (note in particular the interesting discussion of forests and wetlands), whose hallmark is the integration of the modes of environmental exploitation. The discussion of food systems is followed by a critical reading of the story of technological innovations and of their reception and impact on agricultural change, ending with the conclusion that technology did not play a revolutionary role in Mediterranean history (p. 297). Nor can natural catastrophes, according to H & P, explain change in history, especially in Mediterranean environmental history (p. 303), which is marked by a relatively high degree of stability (pp. 340 ff.). In the final chapter of this part, ‘Mobility of Goods and People’, the connectivity of microregions is demonstrated by an illuminating in-depth survey of the evidence concerning the inter-regional traffic of raw materials and products and movements of people in the Mediterranean.

Part IV, *The Geography of Religion*, examines continuity and survival of religious practices and beliefs as evidenced in and related to man-made monuments and landscape places considered holy, such as tombs and shrines, woods, springs, summits and caves. Next are reviewed various manifestations of the nature of the interactivity between economy, religion and geography, as well as the mobility of people all over the Mediterranean countries in quest of sacred places. In their conclusion, H & P observe that the religious landscape retained its appearance through the ages and that the cultural unities of the Mediterranean had to do with the relation of religion and space (p. 459); in other words, *The Geography of Religion* reflects some particular aspects of Mediterranean continuity and unity. The question of continuity and unity is also explored in Part Five, ‘Museums of Man?’ *The Uses of Anthropology*, in which H & P contend, while trying to refute arguments raised by anti-Mediterraneanists, that honour and shame are particularly characteristic of Mediterranean culture (pp. 522-3). Here, at the end of Volume I, a partial answer is given to the questions posed at the beginning (p. 1, quoted above): ‘the [Mediterranean] region is only loosely unified, distinguishable from its neighbours to degrees that vary with time, geographical direction and topic. Its boundaries are not of the sort to be drawn easily on the map. Its continuities are best thought of as continuities of form or pattern, within which all is mutability’. A comprehensive conclusion is apparently reserved for volume II which, in investigating ‘the relations between the Mediterranean and other major areas of the globe’, ‘will proceed ... from outside in’, whereas ‘Volume I moves from inside the Mediterranean to outside’ (p. 2). Whether the change of perspective will bring about modifications in the findings, observations and conclusions concerning unity and continuity remains to be seen.

The above is by necessity only a brief and selective summary of the contents, issues, received opinions and ideas discussed, analysed, challenged or argued by H & P. Some of the topics have been merely referred to, and a great number have not been mentioned at all: alluviation, colonization and allotment, demography and depopulation, pastoralism and transhumance, land transport, fish and fishing, arboriculture, irrigation, marginality, olive and wine, subsistence and surplus, production and redistribution, to mention only a few. What H & P have to say on all these, and on other topics as well, is interesting, illuminating and instructive, even when one disagrees with them. One of the many virtues of the book is the inclusion of useful bibliographical essays accompanying each of the twelve chapters (pp. 530-641), together with a huge bibliography (pp. 642-736). Useful too are the thirty-six maps, but regrettably the text is not supported by any illustrations, pictures, or site plans, which can be very helpful, as any reader of Rostovtzeff's works knows.

Before leaving this remarkably innovative study, which will certainly serve students of history and other disciplines excellently both as a source of intellectual inspiration and as a mine of information, I cannot help registering two comments, one long and one relatively short and 'provincial'.

H & P have invested much effort and thought in their examination of the place of the microregion in Mediterranean unity and the role of determinism in human history. The first is 'a unit whose definition at a point of time will derive from the characteristics of environmental givens (current hydrology, soil-conditions, vegetation cover, the year's weather) and from the prevailing state of human effects on the landscape (intensity of labour-effort, number of animals, choices of productive strategy)' (p. 303). In conjunction with connectivity (see above), they consider microregions as most important and instrumental for the study of Mediterranean history (p. 123). Unlike Braudel, however, they reject the idea that any kind of determinism is important, let alone decisive for explaining human history; the list includes, in addition to some general statements (e.g. on p. 245), environmental (pp. 36, 61, 124), ecological (p. 48), geographical (p. 80), demographic (p. 267), climatic (pp. 86, 318), technological (p. 292), geological-natural (pp. 304, 308), and religious (p. 406) determinism. Their basic conviction is that people come before the factors of nature (p. 80), and thus the environmental givens are mutable (p. 61): 'the characteristics of microregions are best captured, not by any enumeration of topographical or climatic features, but through an understanding of the highly complicated and always changing interaction of human productive opportunities' (p. 124); 'of the physical changes which demand attention in the Mediterranean landscape, it is with those with which human actions have been intimately interleaved [sic!] that the historian can help' (p. 304). Such a position means that the deeds of man outweigh the environmental givens in shaping the characteristics of microregions and in creating connectivity; or, if one further step is taken, the unity of the Mediterranean world, which depends on the connectivity of the Mediterranean microregions, is determined primarily by human actions. It is not only that H & P are of the opinion that governmental policy and political conditions in the broadest sense constitute an explanatory setting for analysing patterns and changes of economic production (p. 86), but they also recognize the important contribution of social and political explanations in dealing with human history (p. 333).

Now, the rejection of the idea that any kind of determinism is decisive for understanding and explaining human history, a rejection that comes to the fore in the discussion of almost all aspects and subjects of the history *of* the Mediterranean, puts into question the decision of H & P to exclude history *in* the Mediterranean from their study on the ground that 'it is not deterministically to be thought of as a mere by-product' of its microecological setting (p. 2). Once it becomes apparent that the sharp distinction they draw between history *of* and history *in* is blurred by their own criteria, their intention 'to establish how far, and in what respect, this area [i.e. the Mediterranean] had indeed possessed unity and distinctiveness in ages earlier than that of Philip II' (p. 2) seems to stand in need of some revision. Perhaps it is worthwhile after all to take into

consideration certain themes or aspects of history *in* that may help to achieve that goal? An obvious example is the Roman Empire, under which the Mediterranean was for the only time unified and formed an entity in many ways. It may well be profitable to test systematically the applicability, and hence degree of validity, of a large number of this book's assumptions, notions and ideas concerning unity, connectivity and continuity to the Roman Empire, which admittedly extended far beyond the littoral countries of the Mediterranean but whose core was almost always identified with or considered embedded in the *mare nostrum* and its immediately adjacent regions.

My second comment has to do with the Holy Land, the Land of the Bible, the Land of Israel, Judaea, Syria-Palaestina, Regnum Hierosolymitanum, Palestine, Israel, or whatever other term has ever been used, or one may wish to employ, to refer to that not easily definable region. In the present volume it is conspicuous by its almost total absence, and on the three occasions when it does appear, under the names Holy Land and Palestine (pp. 77, 139, 187), it is not once mentioned for its own sake; this holds true for Jerusalem as well (pp. 353, 458). H & P are familiar with Y. Shavit, 'The Mediterranean World and "Mediterraneanism": The Origins, Meaning, and Application of a Geo-Cultural Notion in Israel', *MHR* 3 (1988), pp. 96-117; although they regard it as an important and interesting paper, they merely state the extent of their agreement and disagreement with his notions (p. 530), and never bring up Israel in their discussions. No mention at all is made of the Holy Land, or Jerusalem for that matter, in the account of pilgrimage, which is strange in view of the considerable importance of the religious, political and economic aspects of the massive movements of Jews, Christians and Muslims into the Holy Land over the last two millennia. This omission is also puzzling because Palestine is one of the rare examples of a small country that connects two continents, and probably the only one where such ecologically different microregions coexist in close proximity. Various other reasons could be enumerated why this Mediterranean country is significantly relevant for the problems tackled in *The Corrupting Sea*, but it is to be hoped that this omission will be rectified in Volume II, to whose publication so many readers will be looking forward with eagerness.

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Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, *Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber und Gesetzgebung im archaischen Griechenland*. Historia Einzelschriften, Heft 131. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999. 343 pp. ISBN 3-515-06928-3.

The tiny communities that made up Dark Age Greece had no laws, legislative authorities or enforcement agencies. This did not, however, mean that they existed in a condition of complete disorder or anarchy. Some degree of order and regularity was ensured by *themis*, a term loosely translatable as custom, tradition, mores, folk-ways, mutually understood rules, or simply 'the proper procedure'. *Themis* applied to a wide spectrum of behaviour, marking out conduct deemed just and proper from conduct deemed unjust and improper. Despite being largely implicit, unarticulated and essentially unenforceable, *themis* was, in Finley's words, 'as binding upon the individual as the most rigid statutory law of later days'.<sup>1</sup>

During the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE an extraordinary evolution took place: the development of *nomos*, which intruded upon *themis* and overrode some of its primeval powers. This law, which was to lie at the heart of civic existence, had three features that were normally absent from *themis*: it was recorded in written form (making it explicit and to some extent immutable), it was made public (and was thus easily accessible), and it was enforceable (so that anyone who disobeyed it risked incurring clear-cut, pre-defined sanctions, inflicted by formally appointed community

<sup>1</sup> M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, Harmondsworth 1978.