

H-France Review Vol. 11 (October 2011), No. 218

Gabriel Piterberg, Teofilo F. Ruiz, and Geoffrey Symcox, eds., *Braudel Revisited: The Mediterranean World, 1600-1800*. UCLA Center/Clark Series, 13. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. vii + 281 pp. Notes. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4426-4133-4.

Review by Brian Sandberg, Northern Illinois University.

Mediterranean history has recently emerged as an independent field of research, distinct from ancient Mediterranean studies. Fernand Braudel's landmark *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* transformed historical methods in the mid-twentieth century, but its daunting vision and sweeping scope long dissuaded historians from emulating his approach to the Mediterranean world.[1] Over the past decade, however, historians such as David Abulafia, Peregrine Horden, and Nicolas Purcell have returned Mediterranean history to big questions and long narratives that evoke Braudel's grand conception of the sea and its peoples.[2] The new approach to the Mediterranean world is especially popular among late medieval and early modern historians, who have produced a rapidly expanding body of historiography.[3] Mediterranean history has become increasingly linked to the related fields of Atlantic World history, Indian Ocean history, Southeast Asian studies, transoceanic history, globalization studies, and world history.[4] *Braudel Revisited: The Mediterranean World, 1600-1800*, a collective volume on the early modern Mediterranean, fits nicely into these recent trends in Mediterranean history.

Revived interest in Fernand Braudel's methodologies has led to a wave of publications reassessing Braudellian social history and its approaches to geography, climate, periodization, and historical time.[5] A number of major research centers and academic organizations devoted to Mediterranean studies and/or Braudellian social and economic history have been founded, providing institutional support for Mediterranean history.[6] This volume grew out of a series of four conferences organized by the Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles and held at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library on the UCLA campus in 2002-2003.

*Braudel Revisited*, edited by Gabriel Piterberg, Teofilo F. Ruiz, and Geoffrey Symcox, exhibits the classic tension between histories *in* and *of* the Mediterranean.[7] The majority of the essays here are situated *in* the Mediterranean, rather than considering questions embracing the totality *of* the Mediterranean. The first two essays consider methodological issues relating to Braudel's conception of the Mediterranean, but most of the remaining nine authors offer case studies of particular localities or regions within the broader Mediterranean world. Many of the essays' authors employ interdisciplinary methods, including social history, political history, cultural history, literary history, art history, architectural history, and music history. Matteo Casini, for example, explores early modern Venetian festive culture through studies of literary texts, artworks, and architectural structures.

Fernand Braudel's thinking and his methodological influence are reassessed in many of the essays, making the entire volume relevant for French historians. Lucette Valensi directly examines Braudel's "intellectual family," searching for influences on his methods, concepts, and writing (p. 18). James Amelang's brilliant essay reinterprets Braudel's methodology in comparison with work on the Mediterranean by his contemporaries, especially writer Carlo Levi and anthropologist Ernesto de Martino. Levi constructed a "language of timelessness" to describe Mediterranean rural life in *Christ*

*Stopped at Eboli*, while de Martino posited a “history of continuities” in *Death and Ritual Mourning* (pp. 231, 239–240). Amelang finds that although Braudel shared Levi’s sympathy with Mediterranean peasants, his methodology was much closer to that of de Martino. Interpreting Braudel’s masterpiece through de Martino’s work highlights a central paradox: “the challenge was to envision history not as a choice between change and continuity, but as a ground for their provisional reconciliation” (p. 239). This insight foregrounds the crucial issue of historical time in Braudel’s work.

The volume reappraises the Braudellian model of examining historical change over the *longue durée* in terms of three overlapping levels of *structure*, *conjoncture*, and *événement*. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s criticisms of Braudel seem to have been decisive in reinforcing Braudel’s formulation of the *longue durée* in structural terms. “As a result of the debate with Lévi-Strauss,” Geoffrey Symcox argues, Braudel’s “geohistorical and socio-economic paradigm shifted toward a greater emphasis on long-term structures, at the expense of other elements, cultural or political, which seemed to him less durable.” He concludes that “the pull of structuralism had evidently reinforced his original materialist conception of the city, rooting it more firmly than ever in geohistory and economics” (p. 48).

Braudel’s geohistory relied heavily on Paul Vidal de la Blache’s methodology of “human geography” mixed with a non-Marxist form of materialism. A number of geographers have previously criticized Braudel’s application of geographical methods, but Geoffrey Symcox points out that Braudel also seems to have ignored new forms of geography, such as Walter Christaller’s central-place theory, that were emerging during his own period. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, a prominent follower of Braudel, thus later described his method as “immobile history” (p. 152).

In part because of the limitations of geohistory, Braudellian methodologies have become overwhelmingly associated with economic history. Sevket Pamuk’s assessment of the historiography of the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrates the continuing influence of classic *Annaliste* methods for examining economies through quantitative analysis of demographics, prices, wages, currencies, credit instruments, and markets. Yet, as Geoffrey Symcox emphasizes, Braudel rarely practiced quantitative research himself and offered little concrete data in his 1949 first edition of *La Méditerranée*. The massive amounts of quantitative economic data that Braudel eventually provided on the Mediterranean world was mined from his *Annaliste* colleagues and students in subsequent decades, and was then included in the 1966 edition (and the 1972 English translation). Despite the significant changes between the 1949 and 1966 editions, cities seem to have remained a central focus of Braudel’s study of the Mediterranean. Symcox argues that Braudel viewed cities “almost exclusively as economic actors,” ignoring city views and urban planning (p. 39).

Braudel’s *La Méditerranée* has been heavily criticized for ignoring human culture. James Amelang observes that culture is actually very present throughout the book, but that Braudel’s “deliberate avoidance of a systematic cultural history” is remarkable (pp. 229–230). Braudel’s own mentor, Lucien Febvre, and other members of the first generation of *Annales* historians practiced forms of cultural history that Braudel certainly could have adopted (pp. 30, 36–39, 247–248). Ernesto de Martino, whose anthropological methods often overlapped those of Braudel, “focused exclusively on cultural and religious issues,” according to Amelang, yet “these were precisely the subjects that Braudel omitted from his otherwise ‘total history’” (p. 240). Matteo Casini’s chapter on festive culture in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice reminds us that Braudel’s writings on early modern Italy celebrated Baroque culture as evidence of the continued flourishing of Italy and the Mediterranean. Gary Tomlinson’s essay attempts a broad long-term approach to European music history, situating Mediterranean music at the middle ground between northern Eurasian “shamanism” and African “possession” (pp. 253–254).

Several authors in *Braudel Revisited* comment on Braudel’s unwillingness to consider religion as a serious historical factor, despite his portrayal of the Mediterranean as a space contested by Islam and

Christianity. Bryan Givens explores the “*mentalités* of millenarians” who anticipated the return of the crusading King Sebastian of Portugal (p. 127). Givens’s analysis of Sebastianism provides intriguing evidence of a late crusading movement of the early modern period, which could usefully be compared with those studied by Robert Sauzet and others.[8] Allan Tulchin demonstrates how political reform and religious reformation in Nîmes challenge Braudel’s vision of a static or conservative Mediterranean. Braudel’s lack of interest in religion caused him to overlook sweeping changes in religious beliefs and practices during the early modern period.

Several essays question Braudel’s dismissal of politics as part of the ephemeral event level of history. Jane Hathaway, in particular, argues that political groups utilized colors, origin myths, and rituals to distinguish themselves, constructing a “bilateral factionalism” that represented a conjunctural dimension of social life across the Mediterranean (pp. 55-56). Although Hathaway’s attempt to extend the political into Braudel’s conjuncture is laudable, the notion of “faction” employed seems problematic in light of recent research on feuding, vendetta, clientage networks, and civil conflict in the early modern period.

Although Braudel claimed to be doing *histoire totale*, his approach often focused on the northern (and European) shores of the Mediterranean. For decades, Ottomanists have rightly criticized his failure to consider the Ottoman Empire’s role in the early modern Mediterranean. An entire generation of historians have worked steadily to reinsert Ottoman history into the historiographies of Europe and the Mediterranean. *Braudel Revisited* sustains and furthers this line of scholarship by including three essays on the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Mediterranean by Jane Hathaway, Leslie Pierce, and Sevet Pamuk. Pierce reexamines the Ottoman Empire, arguing that its “polyglot” ruling elite relied on “constant imperial engineering and policing of the social peace” (pp. 76-77). Although many Ottomanists have championed the empire for its multi-religious and multi-ethnic composition, Pierce insists that sultans used conscious policies to manipulate ethnic and religious groups within the empire, actively shaping social relationships rather than merely reacting to existing social realities.

As with many collective volumes, the chapters of *Braudel Revisited* are uneven, some of them reading like conference papers and others like journal articles. One chapter begins “in this paper,” while the paper that became chapter ten still refers to itself as the “opening paper in a colloquium” (p. 229). Such language hints that the editors might have reworked the contributions more effectively into a coherent volume.

The essays’ connections with Mediterranean history and with Braudel’s methodologies are sometimes strained. Carroll B. Johnson’s rereading of Cervantes’s captivity narrative quickly departs from an introductory quote by Braudel (p. 207), and Bryan Givens merely appends an awkward reference to a Braudellian comment on crops to his study of Portuguese millennialism (p. 147). Gary Tomlinson’s chapter presents its decidedly non-Braudellian discussion of pre-modern music history merely as a “background to Wagner’s project” (pp. 266-267). The editors might have asserted more control over volume’s unity through a different selection of contributions or a stronger set of editorial guidelines.

Despite these criticisms, *Braudel Revisited* contributes significantly to the emerging field of early modern Mediterranean history. Readers of *H-France* will be especially interested in Allan Tulchin’s study of the Reformation in Nîmes, which is the only contribution to focus specifically on Mediterranean France. Tulchin examines the dramatic rise of Protestantism in Nîmes, aiming “to complicate Braudel’s picture of the Mediterranean” (p. 153). His approach here complements well recent studies of slavery, piracy, and port cities in Mediterranean France.[9] French historians clearly have much to offer to the history of the Mediterranean world.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

---

Gabriel Piterberg, Teofilo F. Ruiz, and Geoffrey Symcox, "Introduction"

*Part I: Thinking with Braudel*

Lucette Valensi, "The Problem of Unbelief in Braudel's *Mediterranean*"

Geoffrey Symcox, "Braudel and the Mediterranean City"

*Part II: Thinking Beyond Braudel*

Jane Hathaway, "A Mediterranean Culture of Factions? Bilateral Factionalism in the Greater Mediterranean Region in the Pre-Modern Era"

Leslie Pierce, "Polyglottism in the Ottoman Empire: A Reconsideration"

Sevket Pamuk, "Braudel's Eastern Mediterranean Revisited"

Bryan Givens, "Sebastianism in Theory and Practice in Early Modern Portugal"

Allan Tulchin, "Geneva by the Sea: The Reformation in Nîmes in Historiographical Context"

Matteo Casini, "Some Thoughts on the Social and Political Culture of Baroque Venice"

Carroll B. Johnson, "The Algerian Economy and Cervantes' First Work of Narrative Fiction"

James Amelang, "Braudel and the Cultural History of the Mediterranean: Anthropology and *Les lieux d'histoire*"

Gary Tomlinson, "*Il faut méditerraniser la musique: After Braudel*"

NOTES

[1] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949). A second edition appeared as *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), translated as *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[2] See: David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Peregrine Horden, "Mediterranean Excuses: Historical Writing and the Mediterranean since Braudel," *History and Anthropology* 16 (March 2005): 25-30; David Abulafia, ed., *The Mediterranean in History* (Los Angeles: Getty Trust Publications, 2003); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[3] For recent collective volumes on Mediterranean history and Fernand Braudel's methodologies, see: Maria Fusaro, Colin Heywood, and Mohamed-Salah Omri, eds., *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Braudel's Maritime Legacy* (London: I. B. Tauris Academic Studies, 2010); W.V. Harris, ed., *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vassallo, eds., *New Directions in Mediterranean Maritime History* (St. John's, Nova Scotia: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2004); John A. Marino, ed., *Early Modern History and the Social Sciences: Testing the Limits of Braudel's Mediterranean* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State

University Press, 2002); and Alexander Cowan, ed., *Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400-1700* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

[4] Peter Coclanis, "Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?" *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (October 2006): 725-742; Kären Wigen, Peregrine Horden, Nicholas Purcell, Alison Games, and Matt K. Matsuda, "AHR Forum: Oceans of History," *American Historical Review* 111 (June 2006): 717-780; Dennis O. Flynn, Lionel Frost, and A. J. H. Latham, eds., *Pacific Centuries: Pacific and Pacific Rim History since the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1999); Jerry H. Bentley, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, Special Issue: Oceans Connect (April 1999): 215-224.

[5] Olivia Harris, "Braudel: Historical Time and the Horror of Discontinuity," *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004); John A. Marino, "The Exile and His Kingdom: The Reception of Braudel's Mediterranean," *Journal of Modern History* 76 (September 2004): 622-652.

[6] Research centers on the medieval and early modern Mediterranean include: the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations at SUNY-Binghamton, the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies at New York University, the Center for Mediterranean Studies at the University of California at Santa Cruz, the Centre for Mediterranean Studies at the University of Exeter, the Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at the Central European University, and the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta. Several research centers, such as the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, have launched dedicated programs in Mediterranean studies. The Mediterranean Studies Association, The Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute, and the Mediterranean Maritime History Network all hold regular conferences on Mediterranean history, while the Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica F. Datini holds an annual conference in Prato on economic history centered on Braudel's methodologies and concerns.

[7] Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, pp. 1-5.

[8] Robert Sauzet, *Au Grand siècle des âmes. Guerre sainte et paix chrétienne en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2007).

[9] Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2011); Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown and Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Daniel Lord Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Brian Sandberg  
Northern Illinois University  
[bsandberg@niu.edu](mailto:bsandberg@niu.edu)

Copyright © 2011 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of

H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172