
H-France Review Vol. 17 (January 2017), No. 24

Patricia M.E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard, eds., *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 426 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8032-4993-6.

Review by Sarah A. Curtis, San Francisco State University.

Patricia M.E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard, both authors of important works on French colonization and decolonization, respectively, in North Africa, have put together an important volume of essays on “French Mediterraneans” whose primary contributors are scholars of North Africa and the Ottoman Empire rather than of metropolitan or colonial France. By design the volume does not contribute to the body of literature that seeks to examine the impact of French Mediterranean empire (both formal and informal) on nation building or the development of the Republic in France itself, a field which the editors acknowledge as important but well studied. Instead, the authors of these essays are interested in events, actors, or writings that imagined cultures and connections around the Mediterranean Sea in relationship to “French references, French models, antipathies to France, in the name of France, or that took place in France itself” (p. 8). That is a broad mandate, but one whose flexibility allows for new insights into the creation of Mediterranean space both in tandem and in juxtaposition to France. The result is a collection of fascinating essays that will be especially illuminating to historians, like myself, whose understanding of the Ottoman and North African world in the modern “Anthropocene” age (defined here as from the eighteenth century through decolonization) has been oriented around French actors, sources, and historical questions. The view from its eastern and southern shores opens new questions and new interpretations in the shaping of the modern Mediterranean that might begin to produce a truly transnational history.

Four of the twelve essays discuss France and the Eastern Mediterranean. Ali Yaycioğlu begins the volume by opening the Age of Revolutions to the Ottoman world through the writings of a French diplomat working for the British in Istanbul (Antoine Juchereau de Saint-Denis), during the uprisings against a reform government in 1807 and 1808. In so doing, he gives French historians important background on events and ideas circulating in the Levant (how many of us are aware of the Ottoman-Russian expedition to the Ionian Islands in 1800 as a response to the French invasion of Egypt?). Yaycioğlu also uses Juchereau’s work to revise and nuance traditional definitions of Orientalism where despotism was an engine of reform (ultimately rejected by the common people) rather than an impediment to it. The essay also makes us think more broadly not only in geographic terms but in ideological terms of the meaning of “revolutions,” which here did not result in the collapse of the old order and survived the events.

Covering roughly the same chronological period and space as Yaycioğlu’s essay is Edhem Eldem’s article on the population registered in the parish records (baptismal, marriage, and death) of Saints Peter and Paul in the Galata neighborhood of Istanbul between 1740 and 1800. This church was the official parish for French residents in Istanbul, but Eldem shows that it served a diverse European and local population. With meticulous care, he catalogues the ethnic, gender, and occupational categories

revealed in the records to paint a portrait of a population that he describes as “fluid” with “local Catholics...gradually being Gallicized, and the members of the French *nation*, who were acquiring an increasingly local identity” (p. 154), a gradual intermingling that was cut short by the Revolution. Although the French dreamed of an empire in the Levant to make up for that lost in the Seven Years’ War, Eldem argues that they were rather on the path to increased hybridity.

French identity in the Eastern Mediterranean is equally the subject of Andrew Arsan’s essay on “affective empire” in Lebanon between 1830 and 1920. More French historians are aware of the French mandate in the interwar period than they are of its prehistory in the nineteenth century. Arsan argues convincingly that French writers romanticized the connection between their nation and the Maronite Christians of Mount Lebanon, a tie that dated back to the Crusades. In this reading of history, France had a responsibility to protect their fellow Christians when fighting broke out in 1860. Furthermore, many of these writers and politicians saw a connection between Lebanon and Algeria, even suggesting that Lebanese Christian exiles could be resettled in Algeria. If Algeria was a real colony in this period, Lebanon was an imagined one bound to Europe, in the view of these writers, by religion and tradition.

The final essay focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean is also the most theoretically and historiographically ambitious: Marc Aymes’s “tale of Mediterranean coinage.” On its surface, it is the tale of an Ottoman master calligrapher, Vaḥdetî Efendi, who travelled to Paris to apply advanced printing techniques to currency and bonds and was subsequently put on trial for misuse of several of those bonds. Through Vaḥdetî Efendi’s story, however, Aymes really wants to challenge a concept he dubs “enfrenchisement,” in other words “the idea that through servile reproduction of a presumed ‘French model’ a framework of cultural extroversion and social distinction arose that brought about the ‘invention’ of the modern Mediterranean” (p. 187). Instead, he emphasizes Vaḥdetî Efendi’s experimentation and agency; he was neither truly subordinate to the European “expert” who accompanied him (Alfred Churchill, a British subject in service to the Porte) nor to French technological and design models. This insight leads him to criticize the standard narrative of seeing certain individuals as cultural “brokers” in favor of seeing them as “forgers,” who reform “the authority of reigning legitimate currencies” (p. 190).

The remaining eight essays concentrate on North Africa, spanning the period from 1789 to 1960, reflecting the more prolific scholarship on this region’s relationship to France. Ian Collier examines events in North Africa during the French Revolution (1789-1798), a period and space he argues has been neglected by both French and North African historians even though “North Africa was inalienably a part of the world that made, and was made by, the French Revolution” (p. 72). The Dey of Algiers, especially, was supportive of the Revolution, bringing Algeria closer to France, a development with far-reaching consequences. Collier succeeds in rescuing North African/French relations in this period from a single-minded focus on Barbary pirates and argues that the inclusion of North Africa demonstrates the global nature of the age of revolutions.

Mary Dewhurst Lewis’s essay on legal categories in Tunisia uncovers the complex process of determining just who could be defined as “European” under the French protectorate. She argues that to shut down the rights of other European powers (usually exercised through consular authority) once they took power, the French created a new category of “Europeans” whose national rights could be protected by French courts. The definition of a European became anyone whose was “not native, not Muslim, and not Jewish” regardless of actual birthplace. The elasticity of this definition became tested when Italy demanded European status for Libyan residents in Tunisia after the conquest of Libya in 1912. But because European powers were engaged in a constant process of negotiation over the rights of their nationals, Lewis argues that the agreements they made helped define “Europeans” even in a period of national rivalry when a political or economic concept of Europe had not yet emerged.

Julia Clancy-Smith uses biographical sketches of three Tunisian women born between 1882 and 1933 to examine the opportunities and limitations of education for girls in the region. Reading their stories, one is impressed with the sheer tenacity of their ambition, often prefigured by the ambition of their mothers to provide schooling for their daughters. In acquiring an advanced education—all the way to the Faculté de Médecine in Paris in one case—these women forged networks with other women across North Africa and the Mediterranean, networks that were both implicated in and challenged colonial systems.

A similar biographical approach is taken by Susan Gilson Miller in her discussion of Moïse Nahon (born 1870), a Jewish intellectual in Morocco educated through the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Through his writings about Maghrebi Jewry, Nahon sought to interpret his own culture for others from the dual point of view as an insider and as a detached social scientist.

Although his writings supported a concept of Maghrebi Jews as progressing towards European levels of civilization, he came to promote a Jewish universalism that allowed Jews to adapt to “new social roles and identities as the situation demanded” (p. 311).

Morocco is also the site of Ellen Amster’s essay on the construction of the “syphilitic Arab” in French disease literature between 1860 and 1925. It is breathtaking to read how French doctors concocted diagnoses of “a race-specific Muslim syphilis” (p. 326) based on no evidence beyond their own conviction that the disease was rampant in Morocco, especially among prostitutes. Such invented “knowledge” was of course not merely bad medicine but a way of rationalizing control over a colonized population. French doctors used Muslim patients to test new treatments, some dangerous, and colonial officials established closed brothels that “used the Muslim female body to extend state power” (p. 339).

Similarly, Emma Kuby shows how colonial misuse of indigenous bodies survived scrutiny in her essay about the investigation of French detention camps in Algeria by the *Commission internationale contre le régime concentrationnaire*. When members of this commission (concentration camp survivors, all European) inspected these camps in 1957, they hewed to a very specific definition of a concentration camp that allowed them to ignore or excuse evidence of torture as having been provoked by the actions of Algerian nationalists. Fundamentally, she argues, the members of the commission were blinded by their belief, based on their personal experience, that democracies could not create concentration camps; any evidence to the contrary was explained away as lapses, not products of a long history of colonial violence, of which the commission remained mostly ignorant.

Finally, two essays seek to examine the wider implications of French and Mediterranean relationships by showing how they resonated in adjacent geographical spaces. Sarah Abrevaya Stein examines a controversy over Jewish lending to Muslims in the Algerian Sahara at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, which resulted in the arrest of thirty-three Jewish leaders by French military officials. Those officials used normal borrowing and trading between Jewish and Muslim neighbors in this region to create a crisis that allowed them to express their own anti-Semitism while creating divisions among natives, both Jewish and Muslim, that ultimately benefited French control. In this way, the Sahara too became part of the Mediterranean world.

Likewise, Spencer Segalla argues that Agadir, the Moroccan city on the Atlantic coast, was tied to the Mediterranean in several important ways. The devastating earthquake that occurred there in 1960 resonated in the former colonial powers of France and Spain and in the former Ottoman imperial spaces of Greece, Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt. But it was also connected to the United States through the expansion of American military power during and after the Second World War. The rebuilding process became a contest of American and French influence, in which France “salvaged its role” (p. 118) in partnership with an authoritarian monarchy. From the ruins came a modernist city that was later criticized as lacking roots in Moroccan culture, thereby prolonging imperialist rule in an era of decolonization.

Each of these essays can stand alone on its own merits and contain many more arguments and information than these thumbnail summaries can provide. They also provide a useful introduction to the work of scholars whose monographs have become or are on their way to becoming classics in their fields. The essays are uniformly well written, well researched, and insightful. Yet the ultimate test for any collection of essays is whether the sum is greater than its parts. Here the evidence is mixed. The editors have chosen to organize the contributions into three sections of four essays each, one on mapping (Yaycioğlu, Collier, Arsan, Segalla), one on migration (Eldem, Aymes, Clancy-Smith, Lewis) and one on margins (Stein, Miller, Amster, Kuby). Although the section themes can be discerned in the content of the essays, neither the authors nor the editors use them as a primary analytical focus (they are barely mentioned in the introduction), in which case one wonders if a chronological or geographical organization might have served just as well. Readers and instructors will undoubtedly reorganize the book for their own purposes: reading or assigning just the essays on certain periods or places or on other themes (biography, Jews, bodies, local control, etc.) that suit their interests or needs. However, examining the French Mediterranean from the outside in rather than from the perspective of the metropole is an innovative approach that makes the volume an important addition to conversations about France and its Mediterranean neighbors.

Finally, a quibble concerning the cover image, which features an illustration of well-dressed individuals (one with a pet) strolling along the Côte d'Azur, circa 1930, with the sea and sailboats in the background and palm trees framing the scene. It is a very attractive cover, and I certainly hope it helps to sell books. But as a reflection of the contents, it belies the richness and complexity inside. The beautiful people (presumably French) and their leisurely surroundings seem to represent a constructed image of the French Mediterranean that negates the violence of colonialism evoked in several of the essays and imagines the sea as a border rather than a space of cultural transfer and connection. That interpretation does the book a disservice, given the care with which the editors chose their contributors and their theme of French Mediterraneans (plural) that places the sea at the center, not the periphery of modern history.

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ISSN 1553-9172