

FROM THE
MEDITERRANEAN
TO THE CHINA SEA:

Miscellaneous Notes

Edited by
Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard and
Roderich Ptak

With the Assistance of
Richard Teschke

1998

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Notes on Circulation and Asymmetry in Two Mediterraneans, c. 1400-1800*

Sanjay Subrahmanyam

Be satisfied at home,
learning to weave and to spin.
You should not squander too much time,
many are like idle children.
Nonsensical play can turn earnest;
and pretending love
can cause your belly to ache.

- *Basur* (Balinese poem), tr. C. Hooykaas.¹

Sometime in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, in all probability in the late 1580s or early 1590s, the Ottoman chronicler Seyfi Çelebi put down his geographical description of the countries to the east, in the posthumously titled "Book of the History of the Monarchs of the Countries of India, Khitay, Kashmir, °Ajam, Kashgar etc." The text as it is written hardly constitutes one of the literary marvels of the epoch, and its interest resides mainly in the fact that it is a compendium of Ottoman xenology which is not directed to the west, which is to say the countries of the Mediterranean littoral, but instead to the east, a far more uncommon procedure. The sixth chapter (*fasl-i-sâdis*) dealing with the sovereigns of Hind other than Jalaluddin (which is to say the Mughal emperor Akbar, 1556-1605) begins with the monarchs of the Deccan, but moves on soon enough to Pegu (in Burma), then to Sri Lanka (Serendib), and eventually to the sultanate of Aceh (*Açi*

* *Acknowledgements*: I am grateful to Viviane Alleton, Yves Chevrier, Claude Guillot, and Maurice Kriegel for having aided either consciously or inadvertently in bringing this text to completion. Regrettably, Denys Lombard, who passed away in January 1998, is no longer there to read this essay, and more important perhaps, to disagree with it.

1 C. Hooykaas, *The Balinese Poem Basur: An Introduction to Magic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 41. I have slightly modified the translation in the interests of coherence.

vilâyeti) in western Indonesia.² For a brief moment, we are given a glimpse of how the “Lands below the Winds” (*zîrbâdât*) of Southeast Asia appeared, not to some Italian or Catalan observer, but to the Sunni co-religionists of the Aceh sultans from the eastern Mediterranean, who ostensibly supported them in their *jihâd* against the infidel Portuguese in the epoch. The results are not edifying. Having told us that “Aceh is located in the middle of an island but it is a vast place; its Padshah is Sunni and a Muslim, and is called Muhammad Shah,” Seyfi moves on to his real interest, which is in the elephants of Aceh. The rest of the description of Aceh is thus simply an exoticist composition on its marvellous elephants, as if its people have no interest either for Seyfi or for his imagined reader. Seyfi looks out, but one wonders sometimes whether he would not have done better to let his geographical imagination stay at home.

Now, the imprint that geography leaves on history is suggestive and even tantalising, but deeply problematic. A long tradition of geographical determinism is to be found not only in the humanities and social sciences as they have emerged in recent times, but in far older writings, such as those of the medieval Perso-Arabic traditions.³ While it may no longer be popular, as it once was in Persian chronicles on South Asia, to attribute qualities to human communities on the basis of the quality of the air and water (*âb-o-hawâ*) they consumed, and whether they lived in excessive heat or biting cold, the spectre of a geographically-driven comparative world history is still with us (as we see from a recent, widely-cited work, by David Landes).⁴ One solution to the excesses of the genre is to limit and discipline the comparison, and thus investigate to what extent the comparison of the historical trajectory of two distant spaces can help shed new light on the two spaces themselves, as well as on the exercise of comparison as such. The general rule in such exercises has been the national comparison, thus Japan and Germany in the nineteenth century (the staple of many a university examination), or more recently, China and India.

2 Joseph Matuz (ed. and trans.), *L'ouvrage de Seyfi Çelebi, historien ottoman du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Adrien Maisonneuve, 1968), pp. 120-121.

3 For the Persianate tradition, see for example, Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 167-171.

4 David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are so Rich and Some so Poor* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).

I

The meeting from which the present volume emerged, also proposed as a broad theme a comparative reflection, but between the seas of Southeast Asia (the *nanyang* of the Chinese, or *laut tengah* in the Malay neologism), and the Mediterranean Sea. Describing the exercise retrospectively, one of its organisers, Denys Lombard wrote of “un colloque comparatif sur ‘les deux Méditerranées’, celle ‘de Braudel’ et celle qui constitue d’une certaine façon l’espace sud-est asiatique.”⁵ The logical point of departure for us is thus the historical analysis of the influential French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) in his classic work *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, which was admittedly one of a sea seen from a “northern” perspective. As he himself wrote: “J’ai passionnément aimé la Méditerranée, sans doute parce que venu du Nord, comme tant d’autres, après tant d’autres” It would appear that there is little point today in denying the deep-rooted Euro-centric bias inherent in both Braudel’s methods and conclusions. Yet, as Braudel himself realised belatedly to an extent, aided in this by such collaborators as Ömer Lütfi Barkan (the celebrated and also rather controversial Turkish historian of the Ottoman Empire), an understanding of the Mediterranean even in the Age of Philip II was impossible without an adequate intellectual investment in the social and economic histories of the Mediterranean “Orient,” which is to say North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire.⁶ This explains in great part the difference between the first (1949) and the second (1966) edition of *La Méditerranée*, of which only the latter was eventually very successfully and elegantly translated into English by Siân Reynolds (in 1972), earning its author world-wide, if somewhat belated, fame.

The recent publication in the form of a single volume, entitled *Autour de la Méditerranée* (1996), of a number of Braudel’s major articles concerning the Mediterranean, allows us to track the evolution of his thought on this sea and its littoral. Braudel’s researches appear to have begun definitively in

5 *Annuaire, Compte rendus des cours et des conférences 1996-1997* (Paris: EHESS, 1998), p. 203.

6 Cf., for example, Ö. L. Barkan, “Essai sur les données statistiques des registres de recensement dans l’Empire Ottoman aux XVe et XVIe siècles,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1 (1957), pp. 9-21; also several papers by Barkan published in about the same period in the journal *Annales ESC*. Conversely, the influence of Braudel on Ottoman historiography may be seen in such works as Suraiya Faroqhi, *Making a Living in the Ottoman Lands, 1480 to 1820* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1995).

1927, the year in which he registered for a thesis with the perfectly conventional title, "Philippe II, l'Espagne, et la Méditerranée," with the Mediterranean given a modest enough third place, rather than the primacy that it was later to have. This project allowed him, in 1928, to commence research at the Simancas Archives in Spain, and at the Biblioteca Nacional and the Archivo Historico Nacional in Madrid. Indeed, it has been noted that the Spanish sources occupied a central position even in later incarnations of the project, despite the wide range of other archives explored. One notices the interest expressed already at this date in the history of groups such as the New Christians and the *moriscos*, but also in the constitution of trans-cultural networks of espionage. Thus, a brief remark concerning Istanbul at the epoch of Süleyman the Magnificent is significant: "Il y avait à Constantinople une colonie interlope de renégats qui vendaient à l'Europe chrétienne les nouvelles plus ou moins exactes du monde oriental. Les informateurs étaient les mêmes pour les diverses nations chrétiennes."⁷ These renegades, who served as information agents, and cross-cultural brokers, have since been the object of attention of a number of historians, who have thus been able to bring out with numerous nuances the complexity of one of our themes, namely of the circulation of humans in the "two Mediterraneans," outside of the problematic strait-jacket of the idea of "merchant diaspora." The concrete geographical reality of the Mediterranean, on which Braudel laid so much emphasis in the opening chapters of his *magnum opus*, is in fact difficult to make any sense of for the historian, in the absence of the idea of the constitution of the Mediterranean as a social space, for which the ceaseless circulation of humans was a *sine qua non* condition. Some of these were ambassadors, who went as self-conscious representatives of one power and culture to another; thus, the celebrated cases of, say, the Frenchmen Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq or Nicolas de Nicolay in the mid sixteenth-century Ottoman domains.⁸ Others brought back visions of irreducible difference, that they considered essential no matter what the apparent similarities. Thus, it would seem that any of the major mercantile cities of the Mediterranean – Marseilles, Venice, Dubrovnik, or Izmir – had something in common at first glance in the sixteenth and seventeenth⁹ centuries, whether in terms of the languages spoken,

7 Fernand Braudel, *Les écrits de Fernand Braudel autour de la Méditerranée*, eds. Roselyne de Ayala and Paule Braudel (Paris: Fallois, 1996), pp. 27-28.

8 See, for example, Nicolas de Nicolay, *Dans l'empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, eds. M.-C. Gomez-Géraud and S. Yérasimos (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1989).

the goods and currencies exchanged, or the manner in which the mercantile quarters were organised.⁹ But scratch the surface, and one would find the true marks of asymmetry, not least of all in the repeatedly asserted difference (amongst European writers of the epoch), of the manner in which political power and economic transactions articulated “east” and “west” (which is probably better glossed “north” and “south” in the Mediterranean). The account of Friar Jean Thenaud, guardian of the Convent of the Cordeliers d’Angoulême, and who accompanied André Le Roy, French envoy to the Egypt of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri (in 1512) is symptomatic: “Sont les Baasas et fondictz des nations particulieres comme de Turcqs, Jamien, Moresgabins, Indiens, Persoys et d’aultres maintes. L’on nous recitoit que dedans le Cayre se trouveroient deux cens marchans riches chascun d’ung million d’or, et deux mille, riches chascun cent mille seraphs, mais ilz n’osent manifester leur avoir et tresor pour la tyrannie quotidienne que fait le Souldan et les admiraulx et mammeluz sur les riches.”¹⁰

Texts such as these would later coalesce, it has been argued convincingly by Lucette Valensi and others, in an image of the “Oriental Despot,” which was focused quintessentially on the figure of the Grand Turk, or the Ottoman sultan.¹¹ But it is important in this context to avoid the hasty attribution of some essence to the hierarchising capacity of the western observer. On the contrary, the emergence of the image of the Turk was a slow process, that may have begun in the political circumstances surrounding the capture of Constantinople by Fatih Mehmed in 1453.¹² Even if the Turk was a trope in the sermons of Savonarola and his contemporaries in the late fifteenth century, it is only a century later that the public discourse produced by a series of returning Venetian consuls to the Porte permitted the fixing of key elements, and the clear definition of the central idea (for instance) that the Ottomans lived off war, and that in its absence they would inevitably enter into decline. These elements interacted with the philosophical reflections, and political theorising, of observers from Guillaume Postel

9 On Izmir (Smyrna), see the useful monograph by Daniel Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World, 1550-1650* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

10 Charles Schefer (ed.), *Le voyage d’outremer de Jean Thenaud (Égypte, Mont Sinay, Palestine) suivi de la Relation de l’Ambassade de Domenico Trevisani auprès du Soudan d’Égypte, 1512* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1884), p. 48.

11 Lucette Valensi, *Venise et la Sublime Porte: La naissance du despote* (Paris: Hachette, 1987).

12 One of the best-known works in this context remains that of Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

to Montesquieu, eventually to engrave in stone perceptions of socio-political difference that persisted into later centuries.

But this is only a small part of the story of the dynamic of circulation and asymmetry in the early modern Mediterranean. One tendency in the historiography, at times latent, at others quite explicit, is to argue that both the nature of economic ties and the asymmetry of images were reversed radically, and in a parallel fashion, between the medieval centuries, and those studied by Braudel. It is undoubtedly true that for an earlier period, say, the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, readers of Shelomo Dov Goitein's magisterial work, *A Mediterranean Society* (whose five volumes have not received quite the attention of those of Braudel), would recognise the possibility that quite another history of the Mediterranean, with a different set of regional foci, and indeed of *dramatis personae*, might be written.¹³ At the same time, as recent historians such as Mark R. Cohen have pointed out, it is necessary to rethink the Golden Age perspective on the medieval Mediterranean world that seems to underlie Goitein's apparently empiricist approach. This vision of an "Islamic interfaith utopia," that preceded the seizure of power in the sea by the Christian powers (to which Lepanto eventually set the seal), and thus the inevitable rise of not only northern economic hegemony over the southern littoral, but of victory in the "war of images," needs to be nuanced considerably.¹⁴ Looking over the extensive spaces covered in the Mediterranean by the "Geniza community" in its heyday, we also have a second possible model. This one, attributable in its origins to Eliyahu Ashtor, but then thoughtlessly repeated by a number of recent writers, would argue that the medieval Mediterranean was already a sort of "world-economy," but one dominated by its southeastern littoral. This dynamic "industrial core" would ostensibly have dominated the northern "periphery," until a reversal occurred in late medieval and early modern times, with the rise of the Italian port-cities, and parts of Iberia as centres of economic dynamism.¹⁵ One part of this thesis goes back to older,

13 S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1988). Useful work in the same tradition is found in Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

14 Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

15 See for example E. Ashtor, *The Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973). For the perils of such an approach, see the caricatural

and in part quite legitimate, debates, concerning the “real” origins of key financial and accounting institutions that are to be found in medieval Italy and Iberia.¹⁶ But whereas the “origins” debate concerns the transmission of very specific forms of knowledge, and mercantile practice, the “world-systems” perspective mechanistically applies anachronistic and inappropriate criteria to study a space such as the Mediterranean. Basic questions remain unanswered though. Should we think of every coherent socio-cultural space (or “world-system”) as constituted by a core and a periphery? Should we imagine that areas that produce manufactures are always destined to be “cores” in such spaces? Is our repertoire of models so impoverished that we have no other means of conceptualising a space such as the Mediterranean, or *a fortiori*, Southeast Asia?

I would suggest that we need to go beyond simple binary models that split the Mediterranean east and west (or north and south), models that also reflect the old Pirennian preoccupation of the struggle between Crescent and Cross as the basic dynamic of Mediterranean history. These are useful models to approach what we might call the “Mediterranean imagination” (and thus, conversely, the imagined Mediterranean), but they are deeply unsatisfactory. In the sixteenth century, for example, the “western” Christian powers were anything but an unified bloc, even if very occasionally their interests came together. Nor did the interests of the “eastern” Mamluks and Ottomans coincide, wishful thinking aside. By way of illustration, let us briefly consider the so-called Egyptian crisis of 1510-12, studied in some depth by Jean Aubin.¹⁷ This crisis defined a point of rupture in the reign of the Mamluk Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, who had succeeded in 1501 after the four brief and turbulent reigns that had followed on the period of the celebrated Qa’it Bey (1467-96). These were difficult years in the Mamluk sultanate’s history, and plague and famine were spectres that haunted the rulers of the closing years of the fifteenth century. Now, despite the major economic problems presented by the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean, the first decade of Sultan Qansuh’s reign was relatively successful politically speaking. By mid-1510, his authority over Cairo itself and Syria

account in Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World-System, A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

16 This debate has been revisited most recently in Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 49-72.

17 Jean Aubin, “La crise égyptienne de 1510-1512: Venise, Louis XII et le Sultan,” *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien* 6 (1989), pp. 123-150.

was quite well-established, and no potential rival to his power existed among the Mamluks. The sultan himself was seemingly protected by a small group of competent functionaries, amongst whom one could count the *nâzir-i-khâss* and the *muhtaşib*, but also the significant figure of a renegade from Valencia called Taghribirdi, who occupied the post of Dragoman, and whose role it was to deal with the “Frankish” nations. To their number, one can also add such men as the renegade Portuguese, Alvaro Vaz da Fonseca, who after having occupied official posts in Cochin and Antwerp, had offered his services and expertise to the sultan for an eventual expedition into the Indian Ocean.

The Mamluk sultanate was, besides, militarily and diplomatically supported by the Ottomans under Bayezid II, who saw the possibility of an united front against the plans of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (based at Rhodes), and above all against the new menace to the east represented by the Safavids. As Aubin has convincingly demonstrated, in the years that followed, this structure of alliances was completely altered, leading to the eventual defeat of Sultan Qansuh by the Ottomans at Marj Dabiq (north of Aleppo) in August 1516, and the collapse of the sultanate in the months that followed. What is of particular interest, moreover, is the fact that in a situation of growing international economic and political rivalries, the divisions that were defined did not follow predictable east-west (or north-south) lines. The loss of a good part of the Egyptian fleet to a surprise attack in the Gulf of Ayas by the Knights of Rhodes in August 1510 eventually led the Mamluks to mount an anti-Frankish offensive, and among the victims were the Venetian traders resident in their domains. Sultan Qansuh and his advisers then decided to build new alliances in Europe, and sought out the king of France, Louis XII, whose relations with the Venetians were none-too-good. This thus led to the despatch from Cairo, of a royal letter, and then an envoy, who arrived in Lyons in March 1511 with a tempting offer: that the French and the Genoese should take over the spice trade of Egypt that had largely been in Venetian hands. We have already briefly mentioned the counter-embassy sent from France, headed by one André Le Roy, which arrived in Alexandria in early March 1512. This mission eventually ended as a fiasco, with the reestablishment of Venetian ties with Egypt made possible through a rival embassy to that of Le Roy, headed by Domenico Trevisan, which had managed to accomplish the task of “normalisation” by August 1512. The main problem was the diplomatic ineptitude of the France of Louis XII, which as Aubin notes, would have been “un bon partenaire, – s’il

en avait eu le poids." Two points are of significance in this brief episode. First, it is worth noting that the Mamluk sultanate (like the Ottomans later) always had the possibility of attempting to play the Franks off against one another. It was, in reality, almost impossible for even the Catholic kingdoms to achieve a united front, and the situation would become even more complex in the Mediterranean in the seventeenth century, with the entry of the Protestant northerners into trade. Second, it is of significance that when Sultan Qansuh's calculations failed in the instance, the major consequence was to exacerbate the internal political struggles in the sultanate, and permit the conquest of Egypt, not by the Christians, but by the very Sunni neighbours of the Mamluks, the Ottomans.

The lines of political and cultural division that begin first to overlap, and then solidify in the late eighteenth century (and above all in the aftermath of the Napoleonic expeditions) appear far more inchoate at an earlier time. We can see this at various levels, and as approached through a number of possible problematics. One of these possibilities would be to take the case of a port-city such as Dubrovnik (Ragusa), whose complex career between the orbits of the Ottomans, the Venetians, and regional powers allows us to rethink the nature of asymmetries in the Mediterranean. The republic of Dubrovnik had emerged in the course of the fourteenth century as the major port of the eastern Adriatic, and managed to preserve an important place in the next century, when its hinterland came under the Ottomans. In 1458, the republic recognised the suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed, who, together with his successors went on to complete the successful conquest of first Bosnia, and then Herzegovina; but it equally recognised the suzerainty of the monarchs of Hungary until their defeat by Sultan Süleyman in 1526. In the sixteenth century, the merchants of the port had built up an impressive fleet, with which they traded across the Mediterranean (and even as far as England), but their interior network of commodity collection and redistribution in some forty centres of the Balkans was no less significant. The merchants of this port may be seen as one of a number of groups that do not enter the familiar schema of a Mediterranean divided east and west, but at the same time, their privileged position was the result of exploiting the possibilities of "neutrality" (or at times, double allegiance) in a space where different economic and political rivalries were in play.¹⁸

18 Bosko I. Bojovic, *Raguse et l'Empire Ottoman (1430-1520)* (Paris: Association Pierre Belon, 1998); also the earlier analysis by F. W. Carter, "The Commerce of the Dubrovnik Republic, 1500-1700," *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 24 (1971), pp. 370-394.

Seen from an economic perspective, the history of Dubrovnik equally raises interesting questions. F. W. Carter has noted that by 1530, the republic had a fleet of some 180 vessels, which he terms "one of the most powerful merchant navies of the time." The expansion of this fleet continued through much of the century, and it is interesting to note that as late as 1560, it exceeded the entire English mercantile fleet, though the latter would soon overhaul the former. The goods carried on this Ragusan fleet are of some interest. In the fifteenth century, these were largely spices, salt, slaves and minerals, but the composition was to change after 1500. Besides the decline of the spice trade at Alexandria, in which the Dubrovnik merchants had had an interest in the early sixteenth century, the rising importance in the trade in skins, wax and wool is noticeable in the heyday of Dubrovnik. The wool was exported to such centres as Ancona, Venice and Milan, and fed the workshops of Italian manufacturers of the period. Dubrovnik equally imported textiles from the west, a good part of which was consumed in the Levant, as well as in the Balkans, some of it making its way as far as Iran. If one were to analyse this pattern of exchange in the usual fashion, we would be drawn ineluctably to the conclusion that the Adriatic marked an important line of demarcation in the Mediterranean between raw material suppliers, and manufacturers. This then raises the knotty question of the status of the eastern Adriatic, and the Balkans, in conceptualisations of Mediterranean history. Seen from a purely production-oriented perspective, these areas are the mirror image of the Mediterranean "west." At the same time, the region houses at least one great commercial power of the period, Dubrovnik, which however is not a major political power. To further confound the confusion, the cultural construction of the western European image of the area tends to distinguish it clearly from the Maghreb, Egypt, and Anatolia, so that it can hardly be assimilated without further thought to the Mediterranean "periphery."

Further, as Cemal Kafadar has pointed out, our vision of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century still suffers from the very unequal use that has been made of different archives and resources in the various Mediterranean languages. He thus notes the importance of the Ottoman Turkish mercantile presence in such ports as Ancona, Dubrovnik and even Venice in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and emphasises – contrary to the conventional position in the historiography – that "there is no evidence that any action on the part of the Ottoman government or the religious authorities was aimed at stopping Ottoman merchants from trading with foreigners

within or outside the empire.”¹⁹ Since the letter-books and papers of these merchants have scarcely been used by historians, we remain largely confined to the idea that trade was entirely the domain of those from the “west.” Rather, he goes on to argue, even Ottoman cultural history must be reconsidered, outside of a paradigm of stasis until the late eighteenth century, when (according to Bernard Lewis, as well as a number of others) the French Revolution made its first great inroads into this ostensibly conservative Muslim society.

The complex nature of interactions in a number of politico-cultural domains is also brought out in a recent study by Robert Finlay, pointing to the political turbulence in the Ottoman empire in 1533-34, centering around the curious figure of Alvise Gritti, illegitimate son of a Venetian doge, who had briefly emerged as a major player in Ottoman politics of the epoch. Gritti’s career reminds us of the issue of renegades and interlopers raised by Braudel as early as the 1920s, and brings out the fluid nature of identity-politics in at least some parts of Mediterranean society in the epoch. Renegades were not unknown in the Mamluk domains either, as we have seen above in the case of the *tarjumân* called Taghribirdi. There were also other communities whose destiny it seems to have been to play this in-between role, and here the case of the Sephardic Jews comes to mind, with such personages as Don Isaac Abrabanel in the early years of the sixteenth century, or José Nassi and his family somewhat later. But Gritti’s trajectory is somewhat special, even in this gallery of outstanding portraits, since he was the centre of a millenarian movement of prophecies, that suggested that the destruction of the Ottoman empire would be brought about by “the son of some prince.”²⁰ As Finlay shows, this expectation coloured Gritti’s own comportment, and he eventually began a strange conspiracy with the Habsburg ambassador to the Porte, Cornelius Schepper, leading to his own decline as well perhaps as that of his putative ally, the Grand Vizir Ibrahim Pasha. Interestingly, Gritti remained a Christian to the end of his life, and thus does not quite enter the narrow category of “renegades”; this Christian

19 Cemal Kafadar, “A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (1986), pp. 191-218; also see Kafadar, “The Ottomans and Europe,” in Thomas A. Brady (Jr.), Heiko A. Oberman and James D. Tracy (eds.), *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 589-635.

20 Robert Finlay, “Prophecy and Politics in Istanbul: Charles V, Sultan Süleyman, and the Habsburg Embassy of 1533-1534,” *Journal of Early Modern History* II,1 (1998), pp. 1-31.

identity was in fact crucial in some respects both for his ambitions, and in determining the nature of his political downfall (when he was abandoned by the Ottomans, and killed by his enemies in late 1534 in Hungary).

This admittedly desultory accumulation of examples and case-studies has been intended to lead the reader in the direction of three conclusions in respect of the Mediterranean. First, to suggest that the early modern historiography even three-quarters of a century after Braudel began his project remains heavily biased in the direction of not merely the "northern," but more striking still, the "Latin" archives, in Italian, Spanish and French. This is not merely an empirical question but one of rethinking at a conceptual level the problem of objects of research that have a tendency to "disappear" (thus, Muslim merchants in the Mediterranean after 1500), and geographical areas that have a tendency to remain distressingly murky (notably, in the examples we have chosen, the Adriatic and the Balkans). A second issue that remains to be thought through is a chronological one. Should we read the logic of Mediterranean history as one of a pendulum, or do our conceptual resources permit us to do more than this? Or, to pose the question differently, is there any fashion of reading Goitein other than as a mirror-image of Braudel? Certainly, the empirical riches are there to permit us glimpses of other constructs, but a further clue is given to us by the missing link in Goitein's own work, namely his so-called "India book" which remained incomplete. Were we to reintegrate the Indian Ocean materials that the Geniza preserves with those on the Mediterranean, we might be presented not with a "Mediterranean society," but one that ran from Spain and Sicily to western India, and even perhaps Southeast Asia. We would hence be obliged to take a less "naturalistic" perspective on the Mediterranean, which we would no longer treat as a self-evident object, but as one that coalesced as the result of a historical process. Indeed, it might even be possible to pose the emergence of the Mediterranean as a politico-cultural space side by side with the emergence of the Mediterranean as an object of scholarly enquiry. A third issue is a cultural one. For beyond the quality of sunlight, olive oil and wine, beyond the idea of a Mediterranean material civilization that united Baalbeck and the Provence, the most immediate resonances of the popular idea of Mediterranean unity lie in the cultural sphere. It is not uncommon to talk of a Mediterranean "warmth," a Mediterranean "idea of death" or a Mediterranean "sense of honour," however shy constructionist scholars might wish to fight of such essentialisms. Yet, even supposing they are true, we cannot take these congruences for granted,

assuming that they exist as structural givens, in the absence of agents of contact and exchange. This must bring us back to the issue of not only the famous "merchant diasporas," but to other sorts of *passeurs culturels*, of whom we have cited a few examples in passing. In sum then, the *chantier* opened up by Braudel may have an excessively familiar air about it today, but not all the answers have been found; and perhaps more important, many of the right questions have not been asked.

II

The problems in the case of Southeast Asia are somewhat different. Ever since John Smal raised the slogan of an "autonomous history" of that region in the 1960s, historians (especially western historians) have struggled to find out what this might really mean. Does it mean delinking Southeast Asian history from that of China and India, which most would see as scarcely desirable, even if it were intellectually feasible? Or can we, on the other hand, treat Southeast Asia as a sort of *carrefour* (to revisit the formula favoured by Denys Lombard), and does this not carry dangers of its own, of a loss of identity for example?²¹ In a well-known two-volume work entitled *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680* (1988-1993), the New Zealander historian Anthony Reid boldly claims to have applied the methods developed by Braudel in the context of the Mediterranean to Southeast Asia, and puts down his own claims as follows: "Finally, Fernand Braudel's call for 'historians who are ambitious' has been a great inspiration to me. His remarkable success in drawing on various disciplines, particularly geography, to show both the 'collective destinies' of a broad region and its splendid variety provided me with the courage to believe that also in the lands below the winds such methods would yield worthwhile results. In Southeast Asia we have far fewer data and far fewer research monographs on which to base a study than does the Mediterranean world. On the other hand, the region was manifestly better integrated by the warm and placid waters of the South

21 I have discussed this question briefly in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Writing History 'Backwards': Southeast Asian History (and the *Annales*) at the Crossroads," *Studies in History*, new ser., 10.1 (1994), pp. 131-145.

China Sea than were southern Europe, the Levant and North Africa by the Mediterranean."²²

Reid then goes on to state that his exercise is one in "total history," based on "the interdisciplinary approach exemplified by Braudel and the *Annalists*," and lays claim to materials from "anthropology, orientalism (*sic*), and even archaeology ... [and not just] the poverty of the strictly historical sources." Reid's exercise is clearly one in apprenticeship by mimicry: the first volume of his work is thus on "structures" (and such issues as "physical well-being," "material culture," "social organization," and "festivals and amusements"), while the second volume is on the history of events, and political processes. The model is not far to seek, though Braudel has obviously been cross-bred with the colonial gazetteer. Of particular interest in this prefatory set of statements is the view, probably derived from Smail, that Southeast Asia as a region was "manifestly better integrated" than the Mediterranean. It is to this problem of integration, and the factors behind it, that we must hence turn to begin with.

What is the glue that holds Burma, Thailand and Laos together with the Philippines, the Lesser Sunda Islands, Java, Bali and Sumatra? The obvious answer is modern geo-strategy, for the idea of "Southeast Asia" as a well-defined zone emerges during the Second World War as the theatre in which Japanese expansion was to be combatted by the British (the Americans being largely restricted to the "Pacific theatre"). But Reid himself argues for a far older and deeper-rooted idea than that which informed Lord Mountbatten's actions, and thus draws on the Malay-language notion of the "lands below the winds" (*negeri di-bawah angin*), which obviously has the same roots in the monsoon as the Perso-Arabic *zîrbâdât*. He also asserts firmly that "few major areas of the world have been so spectacularly demarcated by nature as has Southeast Asia," but one soon discovers that this is a sleight-of-hand. What has been demarcated is the core of *island* Southeast Asia, and it is rather questionable (as we shall see presently) to claim that the area has a clear northern boundary in the form of the eastern Himalayas. A second possible source of the definition of regional identity is language, namely the fact that some half of Reid's subject population speaks "closely related Austronesian languages." The problem here lies however with the other half, who do not speak such languages, and those (such as the inhabitants of

22 Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680: The Land Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. xiv.

Madagascar) who do, but fall out of the definition for other reasons.²³ Besides, it emerges that using linguistic criteria, we can include only the Cham region and modern-day Malaysia from all the parts of the mainland, in our definition of "Southeast Asia." Other features, such as the importance of rice and fish in the diet, can be found both in East Asia, and in eastern India. Reid does display some hesitation in his definition, noting for example that Vietnam represents "much more of a problem" for him than any other zone, because it falls into what he considers a Sinicised sphere. On the other hand, the equally thorny issue of Burma is passed over in silence.

Let us attempt to separate the more convincing parts of Reid's argument from its obvious weak links. What we are left with then is island Southeast Asia (largely corresponding to modern-day Indonesia), the Malay peninsula, and the Philippines. The case for Burma and Vietnam remains to be proven, while that for Thailand and Cambodia may also be contested. Above all, as we shall see presently, the status of southeastern China remains to be determined in the exercise. A facetious answer is of course possible, to the effect that Southeast Asia is made up of actual and aspiring members of the ASEAN. This remark does point to an uncomfortable truth, namely that Reid's entire exercise (beginning with his definition) remains heavily mortgaged to a backward reading of Southeast Asian history from post-World War II developments. This points to the basic asymmetry in comparisons between the "western" Mediterranean and the Southeast Asian one: today, at least, the definition of the former Mediterranean is not an issue, while that of the *laut tengah* is.

A marked difference is to be noted here between the approach of Reid, and his French contemporary Denys Lombard (1938-1998), in terms of what the appropriate object for investigation indeed was. Lombard, who also explicitly laid claim to the intellectual heritage of Braudel, clearly favoured the idea that southeastern China should be included in the definition of the *laut tengah*, and certainly considered the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and to a lesser extent Guangxi (and even perhaps landlocked Yunnan), as well as the islands of Taiwan and Hainan, to form part of the area he was studying.²⁴ Following his lead, the Portuguese historian Jorge Manuel Flores has suggested for example that the port of Canton could be studied as one of a

23 See, for example, Alexander Adelaar, "Les langues austronésiennes et la place du Malagasy dans leur ensemble," *Archipel* 38 (1989), pp. 25-52.

24 For a relatively clear, if schematic, statement of his position, see Denys Lombard, "Une autre 'Méditerranée' dans le Sud-Est asiatique," *Hérodote* 88 (1998), pp. 184-193.

number of ports belong to the Southeast Asian Mediterranean in the early sixteenth century, but then went on to point out some of the inherent complexities in such a proposal. "In a word, Canton dominated the land better than the sea. The fears of a possible conquest of the city by the Portuguese and the insistence with which the latter discussed the idea is an indication of this. The structure of the city of Canton also bears little relation to the spatial organisation of a [Malay] Sultanate. Rather, its morphology reflects the essential contradiction to which we have already referred above, of a city oriented towards trade but located within an agrarian empire."²⁵

The advantages of including southeastern China in the discussion are several and varied. At one level, the comparison between Southeast Asia and the Mediterranean is facilitated, to the extent that a form of perceptual tension exists between China and the lands to the south, which parallels that between the eastern and western Mediterranean. These perceptions are themselves structured by a number of normative elements and models, as we see from the travel-accounts of Chinese bureaucrats or ambassadors to the waters of the south, in Song, Yuan and Ming times, of which the most celebrated are of course the texts that were produced around the Zheng He expeditions of the early fifteenth century. Commenting on one of the best-known of the Yuan-period texts, the *Daoyi zhilüe* ("Synoptical Account of Islands and Barbarians") of Wang Dayuan from the mid-fourteenth century, Roderich Ptak points to the complex relationship between the formal requirements that were imposed on authors within the genre of Chinese travel-literature, the overarching ideological need to assert Chinese superiority over the inhabitants of the countries that were described, but also the "empirical" nature of the text that allowed certain positive qualities of the Other to emerge from time to time. Further, running through the text (and comparable, in Ptak's view, to the narratives of Odorico of Pordenone or Mandeville) is a synthesis of the banal and the marvelous, of "fact" and "fiction."²⁶

25 Jorge Manuel Flores, "Macau e o comércio da Baía de Cantão (séculos XVI e XVII)," in Artur Teodoro de Matos and Luís Filipe F. Reis Thomaz (eds.), *As relações entre a Índia Portuguesa, a Ásia do Sueste e o Extremo Oriente: Actas do VI Seminário Internacional de História Indo-Portuguesa* (Macau and Lisbon: The Editors, 1993), p. 28.

26 Roderich Ptak, "Glosses on Wang Dayuan's *Daoyi zhilüe* (1349/50)," in Claudine Salmon (ed.), *Récits de voyage des Asiatiques: Genres, mentalités, conception de l'espace* (Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1996), pp. 127-142.

One of the major asymmetries in the relationship between China and the lands to the south lies in the fact that we do not dispose of significant texts from the south in the period that is of interest to us, that present us with *their* image of China. This is roughly similar to the problem of, say, Egyptian and Turkish images of Italy and France in the sixteenth century, though it turns out that this issue of Middle Eastern "xenological" production on the West has been somewhat underestimated and under-studied. Did the denizens of Java or Bali in the sixteenth or the seventeenth centuries look up then to the Middle Kingdom, accepting its pretensions and agreeing to be a part of its world-order? The question is a more treacherous one than appears to be the case at first glance. We have noted that we do not have major accounts left behind by travellers from Java or Sumatra who visited China in the period, and for this Chinese official policies are probably partly responsible. It is too facile to imagine simply that, as good disciples of Wallerstein, they saw China as the great "advanced" manufacturing power of the region, in comparison to their own humble status as primary-product exporters. Nor is there clear evidence of the transfer of Chinese politico-cultural models into island Southeast Asia, as had happened in the latter part of the first millenium with the Indic (largely Sanskritised) political culture.²⁷ Where did this happen was to an extent in Vietnam, where even after the expulsion of the Ming Chinese in the first half of the fifteenth century, literati culture remained heavily influenced from the north. The new type of political formation that emerged in much of Southeast Asia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the sultanate, and the "absolutist" Buddhist kingdom, and neither of these appear to owe all that much to Chinese normative influence.

But this does not mean that the Chinese had no significant role to play in developments in the *nanyang* in this epoch. There were Chinese to be found in many of the major kingdoms of the south in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whose place can be compared to that of European renegades in the Ottoman domains, or earlier in Mamluk Egypt. Pin-tsun Chang has suggested that while a few Chinese settlements did exist to the south in the fourteenth century, these were "hardly widespread and long-lasting"; he hence concludes that "we can state with confidence that the first Chinese

27 Cf. the useful remarks in Sheldon I. Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, A.D. 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization and the Question of Ideology," in J. E. M. Houben (ed.), *The Ideology and Status of Sanskrit in South and Southeast Asia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 197-247.

diaspora did not emerge until the early fifteenth century.”²⁸ What is certain is the importance of this presence in the centuries that followed, both for areas such as Java and Thailand, and for southeastern China itself. In the case of Java, work by Peter Carey, and more recently Luc Nagtegaal, has drawn attention to the continuing (and indeed growing) significance of this Chinese presence after the Ming-Qing transition of the mid-seventeenth century. In centres such as Jepara, it has been noted that Chinese immigration had a major role to play already in the 1680s, while somewhat later the Chinese community in Semarang is of particular note.²⁹ Some descendants of these families became political entrepreneurs and revenue-farmers: thus, we have the case of the celebrated Jayadiningrat, his brother and son, all of whom were of importance in the relationship between Semarang and Kartasura.

It is thus possible to argue, without a great deal of exertion, that the history of island Southeast Asia begins to make a great deal more sense once we bring the “Chinese factor” in, and that the rather exaggeratedly “patriotic” construction of an “autonomous” Southeast Asia by Reid is highly problematic, even on his own terms. Indeed, a little reflection on the logic of Reid’s exercise points to further problems. It turns out that the bulk of his source materials are European, in particular travel-accounts, and that in the final analysis, what provides him with a closing point to his “Age of Commerce” is once more the European *deus ex machina*. Thus, the notional “defeat” of Southeast Asian polities by the Dutch, and their subordination to the “Dutch-dominated world-system” are seen by him as points of closure, though he does insist (perhaps excessively) that his “age of commerce” is not to be taken as a “Golden Age.”³⁰ But equally worth remarking is Reid’s firm rejection of any possible bracketing of island Southeast Asia with China (or any part thereof). In his view, “those who travel to Southeast Asia, from China, India, or anywhere else know at once they are in a different place,” whereas presumably the traveller from the Philippines to Arakan, or

28 Pin-tsun Chang, “The First Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century,” in R. Ptak and D. Rothermund (eds.), *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400-1750* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), pp. 13-28.

29 Luc Nagtegaal, *Riding the Dutch Tiger: The Dutch East Indies Company and the North-east Coast of Java, 1680-1743* (Leiden, KITLV Press, 1996), pp. 95-98, 166-167.

30 Anthony Reid, “Introduction: A Time and a Place,” in Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power and Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 1-19.

from Ayuthia to Timor, in the sixteenth century thought he (or she) was in the same place. Not only this: Southeast Asia “had more in common with Europe than with the great landmasses of Asia,” and this of course rules out any possibility of commonalities across the South China Sea. The Chinese are mentioned innumerable times in his work, but as outsiders, whether traders or observers.

Some of this reticence with regard to reconceptualising the place of southeastern China may of course be rooted in the notorious inwardness of Chinese historiography itself, which modern western Sinologists have served in some measure to reinforce. Only relatively recently have some correctives begun to emerge, and these are partial ones. We may take, for example, the collective project headed some two decades ago by Morris Rossabi on “Multi-State Relations in East Asia, 10th-14th Centuries,” which set out to examine the nature of China’s unequal relations with its neighbours at the time of the Songs (960-1279), based on the hypothesis that not all Chinese dynasties “had uniformly and rigidly applied this system of foreign relations from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) on.”³¹ Their conclusions, based on studies of relations with Central Asia, Manchuria, Korea, Japan and Tibet, allowed the members of the project to conclude that the Songs, who were a notoriously weak dynasty militarily speaking, were obliged to follow a policy of flexibility and pragmatism, rather than structure matters essentially through the prism of the “tribute system”.³² However, it is suggested that with the arrival of the Mongols in China, this rather exceptional situation came to an end, and was replaced by a version of the older system of “universal domination”.

The collection mentioned above does not, unfortunately, deal with the relations to the south for the most part. Nor does it really come to grips conceptually with the issue of dismantling the idea of an essential China, that has been in existence for at least two millenia. This challenge was met in a work published a few years after that of Rossabi and his collaborators, by Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski, on eighteenth-century China. Divided into two unequal halves, the shorter first part of the work addressed the Qing

31 Morris Rossabi, “Introduction,” in Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbours, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 1-13.

32 For another, rather more “internalist,” perspective on the Song, also see John Winthrop Haeger (ed.), *Crisis and Prosperity in Sung China* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), pp. 1-13.

state and its emergence, its policies, and its relationship to social relations and cultural life. Thus far, the fairly characteristic tactic of generalising on a pan-Chinese scale, very often from normative texts written by literati, was followed. But the second part introduced a major shift in the terms in which China was viewed, by insisting on the importance of a regional perspective. Thus, the section on the southeast coast (Fujian), which the authors noted "had long been officially characterized as a very unruly region," insisted on a number of specific regional characteristics: high population density, unusually powerful lineage organisation, a high degree of social ferment.³³ The region, like its southwestern neighbour Lingnan (comprising the provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong), had moreover remained loyal to the Ming cause, thus further asserting its difference with respect to the north. Taking various regional trends in the two areas into consideration, Naquin and Rawski concluded that "being areas of strong out-migration and competitors with one another for overseas trade, both regions faced more toward the sea than toward Peking," a conclusion that would support the idea that the areas on either edge of the South China Sea might be seen as possessing features of commonality in the period under consideration.

It thus emerges quite clearly, to my mind, that the greatest subversive potential in the idea of a "Southeast Asian Mediterranean" might lie not in terms of its effects on conventional Southeast Asian historiography, but rather in permitting us to rethink the reified vision of an eternal China, to which Mark Elvin, Joseph Needham and so many others have contributed. It might be possible to argue that for a time at least, in the centuries from the Zheng He expeditions, to the nineteenth century, a fairly close multi-lateral relationship was built across the South China Sea, involving southeastern China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Java, and that this had significant implications for Chinese history in the long-term. It is surely no coincidence that it was from this southeastern crucible that the major challenge to the Qing dispensation came in the nineteenth century, in the form of Hong Xiuquan and the so-called Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.³⁴

33 Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 167-184.

34 Cf. the brilliant account by Jonathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (London: Harper-Collins, 1996).

III

The contributions to the Paris colloquium were largely concerned with the twin problems of comparison in the present, and the institutional modes that have existed for bridging distances in the past. There is obviously an inherent cultural tension as we traverse the space between Padua and Panarukan, or Cairo and Canton, a tension that appears equally in the works of travellers from the medieval or early modern periods. Historians and specialists of literature usually read travel-accounts because they stress strangeness, difference, and privilege the exotic over the banal; some exceptions of course exist, but they have never been the primary concern of analysts.³⁵ At the same time, the traveller is usually not a solitary person – at least statistically speaking. The self-conscious traveller is instead usually an element in a system of circulation, a member of a larger set, even if others have not chosen to articulate what the author-traveller does. To this extent, moving from, say, the celebrated Maghrebi traveller Ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century, to the lesser-known Frenchman Augustin de Beaulieu in the early seventeenth century, we see that they each form part of a system of the circulation of ideas, including politico-cultural models. One way of addressing this issue of circulation is through the notion of “diaspora,” which I myself find somewhat unsatisfactory; another is in terms of some rather vaguely defined notion of an “oikumene.”

Examples from the region between the two “Mediterraneans” chosen as a focus here, notably from such areas as India, Iran and Russia, in the period between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, suggest that various other networks and systems of knowledge articulated with trading organisations, empires, and religious movements to produce a domain that was at once fragmented culturally, and united for a number of purposes. Whatever be our final conclusion, I would plead for a summary rejection, once and for all, of those unfortunate and simple-minded models, in which historical change in general, and “modernity” in particular, spreads like an inexorable stain from its single Mediterranean (and especially European) centre to ima-

35 For a classic collection of essays on the question, see the special number of *L'Ethnographie*, vol. 74, nos. 1-2 (1980), entitled “Voyages au pays de l'alterité.” Amongst other texts, this collection contains a fine translation and analysis of the account of the fifteenth-century Russian traveller to India, Athanase Nikitine (Afanasij Nikitin) by Charles Malamoud, “*Le Voyage au-delà des trois mers d'Athanase Nikitine*,” pp. 85-134.

ginary “peripheries” located all over the world. Instead, the present exercise suggests that the idea of maritime spatial networks can be extended out of the Mediterranean to other zones as well, and help us not only to understand these other areas better, but equally to rethink our preconceptions concerning the Mediterranean itself.

It was suggested in the course of the closing discussions at the colloquium that other “Mediterraneans” could be found elsewhere, if one were willing to look hard enough. Thus, one could consider the Sea of Japan, and the relationship between western Japan, Korea, and the Chinese provinces north of the Yangzi (Jiangsu, Shandong etc.) as having a special relationship. Similar arguments could be made with even greater conviction perhaps for, say, the Baltic Sea (uniting eastern Denmark, southern Sweden, northern Germany and Poland with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, as well as the Gulf of Finland), and with some degree of assurance even for the Bay of Bengal. In the face of these remarks, intended largely as a critique, my recollection is that Denys Lombard remained unshaken in his conviction as to the utility of the exercise. At that time, I was less than convinced, but today I must confess to having veered around somewhat to his viewpoint. The major disadvantage of the idea of the “Mediterranean” as conceived by Braudel is undoubtedly that it lends a somewhat unnecessarily mystic quality to the sea. On the other hand, the central utility of an idea such as that of the Mediterranean (or that of the Atlantic, briefly popular in the 1960s, before falling victim to Anglo-American provincialism), is that it enables us to practice meaningful forms of what today has begun to emerge into fashion as “world history.” That is to say, it allows us to transcend or refashion national boundaries in the search for meaningful objects for historical analysis, a procedure that is absolutely essential as one moves back in time to an epoch when the nation-state was as yet a distant prospect. If we are to avoid the brute teleologies to which the greater part of our (more-or-less) official national histories subject us, the idea of a maritime region as the meaningful focus of historical analysis remains attractive, even if one may wish to debate both the modalities and the content of such an analysis.³⁶ The Mediterranean as an object of enquiry is a salutary corrective even as the European Community begins to build up its own version of Fortress Europe, and the same could be said for its Southeast Asian

36 Of interest in this context is the recent work by Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

counterpart, in the face of the constant temptation to reify the pristine China. Therein lies the seduction of the idea, even if the proof of the pudding lies, as always, in the eating.