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Critical Practices of Making Architecture and Writing History Across the Mediterranean

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How can two different Mediterraneans be treated as one: both the temporal level of things that have been done and produced in the Mediterranean area as a lived space, and the temporal level of things that have been said and written about it—its scholarly re-imagination? The different approaches to researching, writing about, and practicing architecture in a physically concrete region that has been continuously reimagined in scholarly discourse have led to this Special Collection, titled 'The Two Mediterraneans that Live Apart, Together: Making Architectures and Writing Histories'. Written both as a prologue and an epilogue to the four papers featured in this Special Collection, this editorial essay offers fresh perspectives on the region and its strong global connectivities throughout history. Together with the papers that it introduces, the editorial ventures into the ambiguously constructed yet curiously pervasive category of Mediterranean architecture, while attempting to dismantle the established categories and convictions that has hitherto defined it in Western scholarly discourse. Overall, the main goal is to present just a glimpse of how architectural and urban historians across the Mediterranean and/or of the Mediterranean dwell on the diverse local knowledges produced in each place and period, critically resituating the Mediterranean both as a 'real' and an 'imagined' sea of global interconnectedness.

Keywords: Mediterranean architecture; coexistence; accommodation; cross-culturality; encounters; architectural theory and practice

Introduction

What are the particularities and limits of the Mediterranean as both a geographical-cultural and a conceptual space? Since Fernand Braudel, historians, including art and architectural historians, have been asking some version of this question and providing answers that have been remarkably in line with the shared diversity of the Mediterranean: each answer novel and distinct, but also overlapping on certain points. In 2014, the question was asked once again in the journal *Perspective*, published by l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA), formulated as, 'Qu'est-ce que l'espace méditerranéen au Moyen Âge?' Michele Bacci was the moderator of the debate, and Carola Jäggi, Bianca Kühnel, Rafał Quirini-Popławski, Avinoam Shalem and Gerhard Wolf were the discussants (Bacci et al. 2014). One of Bacci's questions and the first lines of one answer to it are worth quoting in full:

> Michele Bacci: To what extent does the Mediterranean correspond to a geographical space that is also perceived, if not as a coherent cultural phenomenon, at least as a dynamic network of mutually linked artistic production sites?
>
> ...
>
> Gerhard Wolf: Talking about the perceptions of the Mediterranean space makes me think that it is necessary to distinguish two temporal levels in this vast historical horizon: that of the discourses on the Mediterranean that have taken place from the 19th century until today, and that of the centuries of which we speak and which extend from late antiquity to the beginning of the modern era, namely that of globalization. (Bacci et al. 2014: 219, 222)

Since the debate concerned the Middle Ages, Wolf's second temporal level extends only to the beginning of the modern era, but for a more encompassing perspective, we can bring it to the present as well. That gives us the temporality of the things said and written about the Mediterranean and the temporality of things done and produced in the Mediterranean. To reverse the order and reformulate the phrase in the language of art and architectural history, this gives us an object and its varied representations. Hence, the Mediterranean is a lived and experienced space, but always perceived through the filters of how it is described, explained and articulated.

If we follow Eva R. Hoffman into the reception room of the Norman Royal Palace (1150–1200) in Palermo, explored in her article 'Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century', we enter a space where textile and architecture merge, where fabric melts into mosaic. The design and decoration of the room's vaulting was inspired by luxury textiles, whose sites of origin, whether the Byzantine world or the Islamic, are no longer of any importance.

In Hoffman's Mediterranean, sites of production are the trajectories of mobility, the maritime networks of the Mediterranean (Hoffman 2001). Now, imagine taking a tour of Pisa with Karen Rose Mathews, who in her work observes the Pisan churches and their *bacini*, enameled ceramic bowls from the Islamic world used for wall decoration. We are still in a naval world of objects continuously on the move, but this time the beginning and end points of trajectories are important. Whether brought to Pisa by trade or war, *bacini* were deeply localized reflections of Pisan civic identity as a city of merchants and crusaders (Mathews 2014). Moreover, the demand for *bacini* quickly increased to such an extent that in the 14th century it led to the emergence of the Pisan ceramic industry, and soon *bacini* were decorating buildings of various typologies in Spain, Turkey, France, Greece, Albania and Egypt, and could even be found in Kenya and Yemen (Mathews 2022: 465, 466). An object produced in the Islamic world was first localized into an architectural decoration and imbedded into Pisan identity, and then turned into an *international style.*

There were indeed many international styles in the premodern Mediterranean. Suppose we now step into the Great Mosque of Córdoba (785−971) with Alireza Naser Eslami, who writes about architectural connectivity in the medieval Mediterranean, as our tour guide. We would certainly marvel at the magnificence of the space, which can best be described as a hypostyle forest of horseshoe arches. But we would also marvel at the uncanny appearance of the bichrome banded masonry of the arches throughout the Mediterranean, widely applied along its southern and northern shores, in the east as well as the west. In Eslami's Mediterranean *ablaq* is the international style of the medieval Mediterranean (Eslami 2016). If somehow Jerrilynn D. Dodds, a specialist on medieval Iberia, was accompanying Eslami during our visit, then we would have recognized another international style, this time more localized within the architectural topography of Iberia and North Africa. The horseshoe arches, so characteristic of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, could in fact be seen in Visigothic churches and North African mosques as well. While defying all notions of influence and imitation, in Dodds' Mediterranean, horseshoe arches are also intricately ideological, resonating with discourses of conquest and reconquest (Dodds 1990).

Sometimes, the relationship between architecture and discourses of conquest could be confusingly complicated. To be in Bursa, the Byzantine city of Prousa and the first capital of the Ottomans from 1326 to 1402, under the guidance of Suna Cagaptay, who has published extensively on Ottoman Bursa, would reveal this complexity. Almost a century-long accommodation and mingling of architectonic elements and building techniques produced such a synthesis that distinctions between Byzantine and Ottoman disappeared and led to one of the most radical examples of a localized international style (Cagaptay 2020). In Cagaptay's Mediterranean, past and present architectural practices, forms and styles coexist on a new temporal plane. Even in

the case of Constantinople/Istanbul, where the Ottoman conquest and its aftermath may at first glance appear to have consciously and programmatically erased the past and inscribed the conquest into the urban fabric of the city, Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu, whose monograph explores the reconstruction of the city under Mehmed II, would prove otherwise. Every conversion of a church to a mosque, every new edifice built, every urban space reappropriated continuously brought the past to the present, creating an imperial architectural idiom never fully detached from its predecessor (Kafesçioğlu 2009).

Our purpose in this introduction is not to give a full account of the incredibly rich literature on Mediterranean architecture — or architecture in the Mediterranean. However, the short imaginary journey above, with some of the key figures as our guides, demonstrates one thing: There are indeed many different representations of the Mediterranean, many different answers to the question that opened the introduction. At the same time, certain points in each different answer converge. One key point of convergence is what came to be known as cross-culturality. To use Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's terminology, it is not just that there were many microecologies across the premodern Mediterranean, but from an architectural point of view, the whole basin acted as a microecology of perceptible and imperceptible connectivities (Horden and Purcell 2000). Through encounter and exchange, architectural forms, styles, typologies and techniques merged, and not just across space but crucially also across time. This strange temporal fluidity is also true for the modern era, whether in the actual practice of architecture that harks back to a past and reproduces its forms, or in the myths of a Mediterranean architecture that emphasize an almost uniform continuity (Lejeune and Sabatino 2010; Vergara and Pizza 2021). There seems to be a peculiarly Mediterranean temporality, and that takes us back to Gerhard Wolf's answer.

This Special Collection is concerned with the end point of Wolf's two temporal levels, as we have equalized them above: the present. Although contributions deal with different periods, our main framing question is about today. We asked our contributors to think about merging two different Mediterraneans, namely, the temporal level of things that have been done and produced in the Mediterranean as a lived and experienced space, and the temporal level of things that have been said and written about it — its scholarly re-imagination. And we asked them to do this with a practice-based question: 'How do we conduct research and write about architecture, and/or practice architecture in a physically concrete region that has been continuously reimagined in scholarly discourse?' Hence, the title of this special collection, 'The Two Mediterraneans that Live Apart, Together: Making Architectures and Writing Histories'.

In other words, our question was about reconciliation, and a very difficult one at that. In our individual disciplines and fields, as we deal with the very material reality of architecture within a very material space, we are also dealing with the very material problems related to that space: Nation states with thick borders and often cumbersome visa requirements; political upheavals, conflict and violence; racism and discrimination; refugees losing their lives on the waters of the Mediterranean on a daily basis; natural disasters, ecological crises, pandemics; and economic uncertainty, job insecurity and urban displacement. All the while, we are encouraged to look back in time and think about the Mediterranean as a space of ever-expanding networks, cultural encounters and exchanges. Is cross-culturality then the inescapable truth of the Mediterranean?

Perhaps so, but with a caveat. In *The Ground of the Image*, the late philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy defines truth as violent, and with a discreet homage to Hans-Georg Gadamer, writes that 'truth ruins method despite all the latter's efforts'. But Nancy distinguishes between two truths: the true truth (*la véritable vérité*) that is violent because it is indeed veritably true, and truth that is true only insofar as it is violent (Nancy 2005: 17, 18). As a truth, the cross-culturality that this Special Collection is concerned with is not the latter that ruins our varied methodologies by the sheer force of its violent resurgences. It is cross-culturality as it is veritably revealed as truth through our diverse ways of approaching the Mediterranean and its architectures. In that respect, it is not a singular truth nor a universal transcendent, but a truth with many different faces, some of which purposefully disrupt any romanticized rosy picture of a uniquely cross-cultural Mediterranean.

The Architectures of the Mediterranean in 'Modern Times'

In the SAH Connects panel (2022) that eventually grew into this Special Collection, the co-chairs together with the panel participants had pondered over the following question: What ties the diverse cultures, civilization, and cities across the Mediterranean Rim together today?[1] The answers ranged from politics to material culture, and how they were received by the audience also broadly differed: Could we think of the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's failed top-down the Union for the Mediterranean project (2008), for instance, as an attempt to acknowledge Mediterranean identity? Was the actualized grassroots unification of the Mediterranean through uprisings and occupations that began with the Arab Spring (2011–2013) a testament to its existence? In the end, it was apparent to all of us that thinking critically about architecture and urbanism, and 'Mediterranean architecture' in particular, may hold the key to responding to such broader inquiries through the perspective of cross-culturality.

And there were multiple routes to take. When we think about contemporary Mediterranean architecture, we might well be thinking about projects such as Bernard Tschumi's Acropolis Museum and Renzo Piano's Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre, each forming imaginative dialogues with the topography and architectural heritage of Athens; or we might rather prefer meandering through the social housing projects in the cities of the Mediterranean, shaped through postcolonial and national political agendas (Demerdash 2019; Elshahed 2019). In this instance, certain 'vernacular' stylistic or decorative elements found their way into the design, or a 'traditional courtyard', befitting the local climatic conditions, was inserted into the otherwise 'modernist' floor plans (Çelik 1997). Many projects built after these colonial experiments show how religious, ethnic and national identities are entangled with the way in which Mediterranean architecture has been imagined, while connections are made to various other coexistent, 'invented' or 'culturally embedded', architectural paradigms. No surprise, then, that Turkish architect Turgut Cansever's Demir Holiday Village (Demir Tatil Köyü) by the shores of the Mediterranean won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1992 for building 'a common architectural language based upon Greek, Byzantine, and Ottoman precedents' (**Figure 1**).[2] Likewise, when one of the authors of this editorial essay found himself living in an apartment building designed by Bahij Makdissi and Karol Schayer in Beirut in 1960, the Mediterranean all of a sudden became an intellectual tool for his inquiring mind: He deliberated, back

Figure 1: Exterior view, Demir Holiday Village, Bodrum, Turkey (1987). Architect: Turgut Cansever. AKTC: https://the.akdn/en/how-we-work/our-agencies/aga-khan-trust-culture/akaa/demir-holiday-village. Photo: © Aga Khan Trust for Culture/Cemal Emden (photographer).

then, whether the brise soleil covering the façades of the building in various forms and sizes, a localized 'modernist' design that protected residents from the burning summer heat, in fact also functioned like the mashrabiya windows (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2: An apartment building in Hamra, Beirut. Architects: Bahij Makdissi and Karol Schayer, late 1950s. Photo: Kıvanç Kılınç, 2018.

According to Mia Fuller, the concept of 'Mediterraneanism' was an idealized, modern (European) invention, just like other Orientalist notions of the time, such as the Islamic city, both of which were inherently linked to the colonial project (Fuller 2008: 977–978, 991). In the early 20th century, 'Mediterranean architecture' mostly evoked in western audiences images of whitewashed cubic houses with flat rooftop terraces, stacked together around narrow streets and cul-de-sacs on the gentle hills overlooking the Mediterranean. But, also because of such attempts at superficially unifying the building cultures of the whole region into a set of stylistic or architectural design formula in the service of the Imperial project, the actually existing ties and commonalities particularly between the port-cities of the Mediterranean might have also hoven into view (Açıkgöz 2008; Kolluoglu and Toksoz 2010; Crane 2011; Amygdalou 2014; Graves and Seggerman 2022).

Then perhaps we should reiterate the abovementioned question in more refined terms: How do the contemporary architectural practices of the Mediterranean, and its diverse histories, relate to the 'non-European', '(post)colonial', 'Hellenic', 'Latin', 'Arab', 'Islamic' and 'local' or 'vernacular' architectures and building cultures? Edward Said once coined the term 'voyage in' — an insurgent activity that describes the movement of the 'Third-World' intellectual into the West, which led to the displacement of the Eurocentric logos (Said 1993). We as editors see this

Special Collection in a similar vein with the papers that 'voyage in', and venture into, the ambiguously constructed yet curiously pervasive category of Mediterranean architecture, while dismantling the established categories and convictions that has hitherto defined it in (Western) scholarly discourse.

The Structure of the Special Collection

The Mediterranean has always had an undeniable charm to it, seen as a cultural umbrella that has the potential to dissolve, even if momentarily, national, ethnic and religious divides across the region through a shared taste in food and music and a common 'lifestyle' that is about being outgoing and cheerful. Beyond the cliché that it represents, the Mediterranean has a material reality of connectedness, and this reality is what brings the editors of this Special Collection and the four papers together. The papers outlined below focus on the region and its strong global connections throughout history. Together they contribute to the ongoing efforts in scholarship where architectural and urban historians across the Mediterranean and/or of the Mediterranean could dwell on the local knowledges produced in each place and period. Their critical analysis of the Mediterranean both as a 'real' and an 'imagined' sea of global interconnectedness gives us the opportunity to look at the contemporary moment from fresh perspectives.

In 'Mediterranean Anatolia, Anatolian Mediterranean: A Landmass and its Sea(s)', Patricia Blessing takes us to the medieval and early modern past of what today roughly corresponds to present-day Türkiye. Blessing's premise is that the study of medieval and early modern architecture in Anatolia, from the Byzantine to the Ottoman Period, has focused on the region as a landmass, marked by mountains, rivers and steppes. Defined in geographical texts of the Islamic world as Lands of Rūm (Bilād al-Rūm) and understood as a frontier region between various polities and empires, as well as between Christianity and Islam, the region and its buildings emerge from the literature as solidly tied to land, connected through trade routes overland through Iran, Central Asia and all the way to China. Yet Blessing argues that the same attention to trade and its routes can help shift the narrative toward the sea, and to a better understanding of Anatolia in a Mediterranean context. Major ports existed in Alanya on the southern shore of Anatolia, which also held a Seljuk wharf; evidence for Genoese presence survives in Bodrum; ports in Balat-Miletus and Ayasuluk-Selçuk-Ephesus that are now silted up continued to function into the medieval period.

While these facts, and their impact on the economic and cultural setting of individual sites, have been studied, a synthetic approach to the question of what it means to conceive of Anatolia as a Mediterranean region has yet to be taken. Blessing's

contribution works towards such a study and asks the question of how including Anatolia within Mediterranean studies can shift narratives that foreground, for instance, relationships between al-Andalus and the Maghrib, or Egypt and Sicily. At the same time, her study also considers the importance of Anatolia's location between two seas, the Mediterranean (or the White Sea in Arabic and Turkish) and the Black Sea, another major body of water tied up in geopolitics.

In 'Mediterranean Vistas: Producing the Touristic Gaze of Coastal Space', Elvan Cobb explores what we might referred to as the touristic commodification of the Mediterranean. Acknowledging that the Mediterranean Sea has served as a place of passage since ancient times, with fluctuations depending on the political stability of the region, Cobb highlights the 19th century as a period of unprecedented increase in mobility, in part due to changing transportation technologies. The emergence of the tourist class played a significant role in this surge of mobility, with touristic encounters across the region orchestrated through guidebooks and travelogues. During the course of the 19th century, these genres grew rapidly, describing various regions of the Mediterranean, from the Ottoman Middle East to the South of France. However, guidebooks encompassing the entirety of the Mediterranean did not emerge until the 1880s. While travelogues focusing on Mediterranean voyages existed prior to this date, such publications also proliferated in the final decades of the 19th century. Cobb's article investigates the reasons behind this delay in the emergence of the Mediterranean in touristic imaginaries as a cohesive whole, and then examines how the Mediterranean, with its diverse landscapes, urban and rural alike, as well as cultural and political variety, was delineated, choreographed and practiced through a comparative analysis.

In 'History and Historicism in "British" Cyprus and "French" Tunisia: A Comparative Study of Colonialist Architecture and Mythmaking', Daniel E. Coslett reveals the colonial history of the region and its ideological ties to a very selective understanding of antiquity. Coslett argues, drawing from the rich histories of each of the Mediterranean crossroad territories, that the British and French colonial governments exploited antiquity to justify colonialism in Cyprus and Tunisia during the 19th and 20th centuries. Officials and architects presented the past in self-aggrandizing ways politically, economically and culturally, while creating architectures to accommodate this self-aggrandizing presentation. Indeed, museums for antiquities, historicist buildings, monumental statues and themed hospitality infrastructures were designed to showcase an alleged correspondence between past and present empires in both colonial contexts. Responding to Jean-Louis Cohen's observation that comparative studies of European empires remain rare

and present opportunities for robust inquiry, this unprecedented interdisciplinary work illuminates one area — heritage appropriation and myth making through built environments — that was exploited by two major global empires. As such, Coslett's contribution invites further consideration of a Mediterranean that is more connected and complex than may be typically thought. It also invites the development of additional comparative projects that span empires, geographies and themes to facilitate an understanding of still-relevant global architectural histories that transcend national boundaries and government rhetoric.

Finally, in 'The Aluminum Curtain: Bauxite and Housing as Strategic Mediators between Mediterranean and the "United States of Europe"', 1949−1951', Konstantina Kalfa, Óskar Örn Arnórsson and Dennis Pohl investigate postwar housing projects in Greece with a focus on material history. They frame Mediterranean architecture as a historical construct with political and economic parameters, and argue that in the context of the Truman Doctrine, and later, the Marshall Plan, the reconstruction of rural settlements (1947−1951) was designed as a strategic fusion of traditional morphologies and modern building technologies and modernized living conditions while indoctrinating Greeks to the capitalist ethos of savings and investment. The US-led housing-aid policies of the era favored the growth of a privately led house-building sector, which became one of the two pillars of the post-war Greek economy — the second being the leisure-driven industry of tourism. Through original research in Greek and American archives, the authors delve into the very materiality of the reconstruction of Greek settlements and its fusion of local and imported components. Their study unpacks a larger infrastructural apparatus of the 'Mediterranean', which turned architecture into a geopolitical question of strategic ores and electricity production. In fact, their contribution suggests that Greece's post-war development trajectory can be traced through the post-war journeys of a single material which acquired enormous significance in the global markets after WWII: aluminum. Despite Greece having significant bauxite deposits, the US actively discouraged the development of a local metallurgical industry for the transformation of bauxite into aluminum. Instead, the US turned housing into a geopolitical tool to secure its exploitation of Greece's minerals: Under the Marshall Plan, regular bauxite shipments to the US alleviated Greece's balance of payments problems, partially enabling the development of the Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction's housing program. In return, the aluminum actually used for housing reconstruction was provided as housing aid by the US. Thus, the 'golden leaves', as the Greek rural population called the corrugated aluminum sheets, enabled self-sheltering while securing the country's role as an agricultural and tourism-based economy in an unevenly developing Europe.

Notes

¹ To read the description of the panel and watch its video recording, please visit the Society of Architectural Historians website at https://www.sah.org/programs/sah-connects/2022/shared-histories-of-architectural-history-and-practice-across-the-mediterranean. We would like to thank the panel participants, Sheila Crane, Howayda Al-Harithy, Ziad Jamaleddine and Abbey Stockstill, whose invaluable contributions have inspired the guest editors to pursue this project further in a special collection.

² Please see 'Demir Holiday Village, Recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1992', *Archnet* https://www.archnet.org/sites/771. The complete team of architects for this project were Turgut Cansever, Emine Ögün, Mehmet Ögün and Feyza Cansever.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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