Chapter 1: THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

The Mediterranean is a mosaic of all the existing colours

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THE MEDITERRANEAN, BETWEEN THE MYTH AND REALITY, A LIVING AREA

Through the ages, the word "Mediterranean" has, for a multitude of people, embodied both the sea which bears this name and the surrounding territories that slither into its waters.

Over the past decades, the Mediterranean has awakened interest and passion, uplifting its name to the level of idea and concept. When speaking of the Mediterranean, unless referring to a single, specific aspect, one doesn't automatically think of the sea or the territory in an isolated way, but convenes - this key word is most appropriate - the very qualities of an area rather than the land alone. Qualities which define an idea, a manner, a world. This idea may seem easy to allure but it isn't so obvious to define: a vast environment, nourished and conveyed by a rich society, thriving with our perceptions of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean is deeply anchored in our imagination as a world rich with senses and sensations

As of now, two observations: the Mediterranean is a complex environment which is deeply enrooted in our social and cultural imagination (1), impossible to grasp if it is disassociated from its global context. It is a reality, made up of tangible material as well as highly revealing immaterial factors.

Let us thus set foot in this captivating and abundant world, full of all kinds of qualities and events.

The landscape

The Mediterranean sea (2) is almost an inside sea (3) with an access only 15 km wide to the ocean: the Straits of Gibraltar. In the North East, it reaches the Black Sea. In the South East, since 1869, it extends to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal. With a 2.9 million km² area (17% vaster than Algeria) it represents only 0.7% of all the seas and oceans of the Earth; it extends between the 30.2 and 40.2 North Parallel, a 3900 km length, and a South-North maximum width of 850 km, with an average depth of 1430 meters. (4). The Mediterranean is acknowledged through its strong temperament, bred by so many characteristics: sea of Alboran, Ligurian sea, Adriatic sea, Aegean sea, sea of Crete. All of which, well beyond geographical denominations, embody a mighty historical heritage and the evidence of Mediterranean's diversity. For, as Braudel says: "the Mediterranean blends thousands of substances at a time".

The azure-blue, crystalline waters of this beautiful sea have generated a proportionately modest fishing activity. Fishing has never been a primary activity, neither as far as catches are concerned nor the population involved.

The lines of the 15th east meridian and the 38th north parallel cut the Mediterranean roughly through its centre. On the strategic island of Sicily, two gigantic cardo and decumanus, are split in halves and quarters, interestingly close to a historic reality. An aspect we will necessarily be brought to reflect upon further on.
Its 46,000 km of coast are often rocky, abrupt, steep, cut up, and often difficult to access. However, flat and broad littoral strips are not scarce, through river-scared plains, some of which open into significant deltas (the Nile, Ebre, Po, the Rhone...) or onto the desert (Libya, Israel...) where sea and sand blend on the edges of opposite horizons. This intricate mountainous range, with valleys going in all directions, winds through a good part of the coast, defining a most particular landscape: a very narrow littoral with a quickly vanishing sea as soon as one ventures inland, abruptly climbing to altitudes sometimes exceeding 500 m. It is not exceptional to find oneself above 1000 or 1500 m within only a few kilometres of the coast (Corsica...) or reaching close to 3000 m (Italy...) or even 4,138 m in Toubkal, Morocco.

Insularity is another typical and significant characteristic of this sea. In addition to the large islands such as Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia or Majorca, Greece alone counts over 2000 large and small islands, only a hundred of which are inhabited.

Undoubtedly, both climate (5) and orography impose the most severe conditions onto the Mediterranean landscape. Several bioclimatic variations bring forth significant, subtle differences in climate with outstanding contrasts in its geographical peripheral extremities. In the north there are massive forests and great continental rivers – some of which contribute strongly to ensuring survival - and in the south we have the Sahara Desert belt. East and West slide slowly towards the South, below the 37th north parallel. With hot, dry summers flooded with bright sun and ablaze with light, soft and wet winters, the Mediterranean climate generally concentrates rains sparingly, in spring and especially in autumn. Although, here again, extreme conditions are not exceptional but a significant, determining factor of this climate.

The lands of the Mediterranean area, two thirds of which are constituted of limestone - are too often scarred by serious earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (6). A rich, perfectly adapted flora grows in all the various climatic and orographic situations mentioned above, consequently generating a great variety, both in terms of the number of plant species (7) and the density of this flora; as a result, one can find highly contrasted landscapes. This often rocky land, with rock tips showing at the surface, provides the most widely used building material throughout the Mediterranean area: stone.

In this constraining climate and on these fragile soils, while some species are well adapted to the scarcity of rain, others are cleverly irrigated. They scent the environment (8) with intense fragrances: thyme, rosemary, lavender, basil, cumin, fennel, mint, jasmine, rose tree, fig tree, orange tree, apricot tree, olive-trees in blossom, and the penetrating flavour of freshly pressed olives... all generate a particular, vividly real, yet immaterial dimension, enhancing the pleasures of Mediterranean life.

A constraining climate, a fragile landscape, but a vital luxuriance. The Mediterranean is marked by this constant struggle (9), sometimes quivering between myth and reality. Similar to olives, bitter and yet sweet as honey.

Nowadays, the Mediterranean area is inhabited by 400 million people. These inhabitants, in addition to those who have preceded them for thousands of years, the numerous more or less turbulent neighbours or far away immigrants who have crossed or wandered through these Mediterranean lands in all directions, freely or by force, make up the people who are the essence of Mediterranean production. A capillary world of integration, adaptation and blood mixing. (10)

The Mediterranean area is attractive, powerful yet delicate, and always sensual: a testimony to the overwhelming contribution of women to this world.
The Men and Women

The stories of this area were often told through the glorious deeds of emperors, sultans, heroes of masculinity, not always paying justice to the importance of Mediterranean women and the feminine strokes they brought. An attractive world, both powerful and delicate, always sensual. The landscapes, which they shaped and maintained through endless efforts, the walls or terraces, coatings or the decoration of shelters and houses, are a testimony to the contributions of daughters, wives, and mothers, creating this unique environment.

In the very flesh of this Mediterranean land, are engraved all the acts and thoughts of civilisations and societies that have preceded us because "a world is the result and the product of social activities". (11) Together with the landscape – the one described earlier – society becomes tangible, and thus, particular and distinct.

The Mediterranean population was traditionally attached to land (the terra patria of our forefathers), to farming and forest activities as well as raising cattle, especially smaller live-stock. This is also true for the populations living very close to the coast, or on the coast itself. Fishermen were a minority who combined this activity with small home farming on more modest pieces of land. On the other hand, since the very first civilisations, the trade and transformation of raw materials constituted a feverish activity in the cities of the Mediterranean coastline. The significant network of these towns and cities has been crucial since antiquity (12) for the rise and development of the area, while at the same time, the cultivation of inland and coastal soils was essential to feed this swarming population. Water, the fertility of effortless and generous soils and of course religious faith, were the basic parameters determining the choice of a settling population. In addition, the choice of a specific spot for a house or village, always wisely oriented, never neglected questions of security (13).

The gradual occupation of every piece of land meant the implementation of intense labour to make the soils suitable for cultivation. This work through the centuries, carried out by millions of farmers, resulted in a typically Mediterranean landscape. Terrace cultivation, a mosaic of alternating pieces of land and woods are a few of its characteristics. For the inhabitants of the Mediterranean area, mastering water has always been as significant as farming. Water is the most essential, invaluable element, often lacking, always irregular. Mediterranean civilisations have always mastered water, transmitting a huge heritage of constructions and know-how.

Land property and its inheritance emanate from two different legal approaches: Roman law and Muslim law (14), in addition to all the various local specificities. The various resulting situations of property and its transmission have a tremendous impact on the way traditional constructions are managed and kept.

Living in the Mediterranean Area

Most of the Mediterranean population lives in grouped housing: Mediterranean inhabitants favour partnership, community life and helping one another. No doubt Greek, Roman and Arab-Muslim heritage have contributed to this form of community. Mediterranean cities and villages are places of vicinity, friendliness and hospitality (15). Once again, the Mediterranean develops numerous and various possibilities. The spirit evoked above is common to all. However, two general cases can be found: first, compact more or less dense villages with different morphological solutions, and second, dispersed villages with seemingly random scattered houses. These two layouts are linked to two different models of social organisation. This second model, very frequent in North Africa, corresponds to tribal communities and societies (16), whereas the first model corresponds to more organised, complex urban societies (17).

Compact villages are organised around public spaces, integrating religious and political buildings, symbols, markets, celebrations, feasts and public events... their morphology and location are conditioned by orography, the need for farming land and safety considerations.
Dispersed villages are "bound together" by the same force of social organisation, but the means of production and property generate a different layout in the landscape (17).

This is also the case for scattered housing (which we cannot actually qualify as remote in the Mediterranean area, for the reasons mentioned above) connected to immaterial but solid and true binds, links that imply many obligations and duties with more or less far away neighbours. Actually, in the Mediterranean area, if the tendency is to group houses in villages, the tendency is also "to group" these villages in the landscape (18).

Scattered housing and villages are connected by a multitude of huts, seasonal constructions, shepherd shelters and large housing systems used for mobile or large travels such as caravanserais. They can also be linked by a complex network of roads and paths. This intricate lace of civilisation always gives a human and reassuring scale to the Mediterranean landscape, never short of landmarks.

While grouped populations represent a majority, scattered houses are also common: they are generally found in less undulating mountainous environments, although there are.

Thus, while the entwining of solid constructions (19) and the inheritance of "a land" are characteristic of the Mediterranean people, it is nonetheless true that nomad societies were abundant at one time in the Southern and Eastern regions. Today, they only represent a small minority, which tends to settle down permanently. (20) The nomad way of life refers to a whole different concept of time, space and freedom. The stage just prior to transhumance.

Still present today though declining, transhumance (21) is a compromise between seasonal displacement and the necessary sedentarism of agricultural populations, which, in certain areas, can mean a temporary displacement of all the inhabitants of a village. For centuries, this way of life, often following Roman ways, contributed to developing relations and accesses to the more remote and hemmed in regions found in mountainous Mediterranean areas.

Mediterranean folks live in the open as much as they do indoors. Climatic conditions allow living outdoors most of the time. Inhabitants seek sun, light and air. Regardless of how intimate the environment may be, as in the case of houses with patios, or even the most secluded spaces of a médina, open air and non covered spaces are a vivacious need.

The Mediterranean area is broadminded, open to exchange, philosophy and other people; it once was the most significant source of civilisation in the world. It has influenced the organisation and evolution of modern societies in a most determining way. It has been an infinite source, a bottomless well, a forceful, ever-giving fountain of innovative ideas, invention, tenacity, imagination and spirituality, but also of covetousness, confrontations and destruction. This produced a greatly dense history, stacked in layers, visible on architecture endlessly rebuilding itself, assimilating know-how and recovering materials, such as the magulas of Tesalia, the tells of Mesopotamia or the höyük of Turkey.

The civilisations of the Mediterranean have not always cast their influence over the whole area and all lands with a same intensity, nor for the same length of time. Distance, circulation through neighbouring civilisations, resistance, interpretation all gave birth to a cultural and historical landscape filled with different colours and tones. The greatest currents of civilisation gave the essential traits to this space. If we glance at our chart of the Mediterranean again, with our two imaginary cardo and decumanus, observing from a certain distance, we will have a practical and simple overview of the main waves of civilisation in time and space.
THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA, OBJECT OF OUR STUDY

The countries that integrated the CORPUS project in 1998 determined the extent of the national territories on which local teams worked: investigations were carried out on the ground. The significant number of these countries was representative enough to make it possible to draw a global view of traditional Mediterranean architecture in the area, though the study did not oversee the full extent of the territory.

A major Mediterranean characteristic is to be sought in the ennoting, foundation, construction and transmission of a place

Obviously - and these two years of work confirmed this point - we have found remarkable studies and monographs on areas, typologies or building materials of the Mediterranean which constitute an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of traditional construction. However, the highly detailed and local scope in these works make it difficult to seize a global view, which is anyhow not the object in these types of studies.

Moreover, certain publications which aim at a comprehensive analysis of Mediterranean architecture, limit their analysis to the “most Mediterranean” models or at any rate to the most typically close to a global cliché, as we mentioned above. Though bringing an additional contribution by their very nature, these works cannot propose all the aspects concerning processes of transfiguration, potential, weaknesses or strategies to preserve traditional architecture; they obviously drift away from these points.

Considering the Mediterranean area is so significant in size - and if we reason, as is our case, in terms of action and effectiveness and not embalming preservation - the extent of traditional construction is extraordinary. Indeed, if we want to avoid the error of extracting an object from its context, by considering heritage as a series of lifeless objects, without culture or time, in stone, brick or wood, then we should accept this traditional architecture taking into account its material and immaterial context. This may seem ambitious, unreal, maybe utopian, and especially as one is speaking about a heritage "without identification papers", ignored / unrecognised, which was granted only small, dispersed means, often too marginal to be effective.

As for the physical area we studied, it is restricted to the obvious Mediterranean area. We admit there is a certain degree of ambiguity in determining geographical limits. Admittedly, from a climatic, biological or cultural point of view, the limits of this area could be the subject for an extensive debate on a variety of exceptions. If we led cases to the end, conclusions would bring us to territorial extents and latitudes that would widely exceed the potential of this study. Obviously, great ramifications are present on all the banks of our sea. How far into Spain do they penetrate, how far into the Middle East? How far down beyond the Maghreb? These questions would obviously concern even larger territories.

It seemed reasonable and effective to take up an area corresponding to the broader belt of territories around the Mediterranean, "saturated with the Mediterranean", beyond this belt, and for a number of areas, Mediterranean signs become less perceptible, more diffuse and diluted into other cultures, landscapes and history. This leaves the area open to a possible widening of this territory in future studies; our choice does not exclude recognising Mediterranean components in areas other than those withheld for this study. However, new territorial approaches, though significant to complete and bring nuance to our work, would only reinforce and enrich the core of the Mediterranean area that all the partners of the CORPUS project chose to outline in this study.

Though this band could easily have been extended for certain areas, the solution we adopted stood as the most balanced and reasonable. Beyond these aspects, we hope we’ve answered the fundamental
question and reached the essential objective of our study: to constitute a global solution, common to all and shared by all. The approach is no longer to obtain a more or less harmonious preservation, but to protect the right of traditional construction to sovereignty and its own language (and workmanship) in a durable development of society. This right also implies being regarded as an essential richness of our cultural landscape, rather than an unhealthy stock of houses waiting for demolition. To become a solution rather than a problem.

The contributions of this togetherness in a Mediterranean partnership only further fortifies the notion of Mediterranean identity. Traditional architectural heritage is a great contribution, both through landscape and culture.
A HISTORICAL MOSAIC

The history of the Mediterranean dates back more than 8,000 years. This history is so considerably dense and complex it would be foolish to attempt to sum it up. These maps shall complete our analysis on traditional architecture by providing a basic historical background to help visualise the major waves of Mediterranean civilisations. We have chosen a straightforward graphic style, drawn up in a few historical charts and timelines.

While the maps we chose represent the great moments of major civilisations, they are unable to express the many subtleties of historical details for the periods concerned. They merely give a feel for the boundaries in ancient Mediterranean territories in certain periods.

Although it is tricky to make light of certain minor historical facts, privileging only the major events (remembering that minor events often trigger major historical changes), it is agreed that the Mediterranean area was shaken by three large waves of civilisation. Schematically, in the North West of our cardo and decumanus we find Rome, the Latin world and Christendom. Below the decumanus, in the southern half, we find the Arab-Moslem world and Islam. In the North East, we find the Greek and orthodox world.

Maps enrich this image showing the influences of multiple civilisations throughout the ages: the Islamic influence extends to the North East, the Latin world pushes South West, evolving into important eras, Byzantine and Turk-Ottoman worlds, for example. We could mention many other epochs and territories: Judaism, Germanic groups, a variety of states, kingdoms and nations, even English and Dutch influences. Clearly, many people, periods and societies have influenced the Mediterranean area.

The colours of the Mediterranean are not therefore limited to three. Each colour is inspired by the various tones and shades according to time and place. Others have preceded, co-existed or taken over, all have contributed to a unique and attractive historical texture. As Fernand Braudel said: "The Mediterranean is a mosaic of all the existing colours".
Notes:

1) "Area" is used in this document with the definition given by Milton Jones and many other authors: "an area results from the combination of society and landscape. Area is therefore characterised by movement, dynamism, and time. In fact, landscape is a relatively recent word (appearing in France in the XVIth century). Some people still use the word "county" to mean both man and territory in an area ".

2) "The sea. We must try to imagine from the eyes of the men of the past: we must see it as a limit, a border, spread across the horizon, like an obsessing vastness, prevalent, marvellous and emigrant! ". for a long time the sea was an obstacle before it became a link. Navigation, ( fleets worthy of such a denomination), did not appear before the second half of 3000 BC, with Egyptian navigation towards Biblos or better still, with the rise, around 2000 BC, of sail boats in the Cyclades... ". The Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel.

3) The Mediterranean, from the Latin word Mediterraneo could be equivalent to internanum, interior, in the sense of "between", "in the middle of". The Mediterranean is thus a sea in the middle of lands.


5) “Mediterranean climate” confers its name to zones on five continents (California, Chile, Southern Africa, western Asia and southernmost Australia), which have similar landscapes.

6) Examples of dated catastrophes in the Mediterranean: Pompeii, Santorini, Messina, Algiers...

7) While the pine is the most widespread tree in Mediterranean woods today, the cypress is still the most symbolic tree, and linked to specific topologies (cemeteries or monasteries, as a symbol of spirituality or as a symbol of hospitality in the Catalan music). The olive-tree covers a significant portion of non irrigated soils. It remains the emblematic tree of the Mediterranean area – it embodies all its symbols – for its role in traditional and current economy and for the beauty of its perennial silver green tones, great longevity, and symbolism. A sober model, tempestuously enrooted into the ground, and especially generous, the olive-tree sums up many features of the Mediterranean area and people. Also, the date palm tree, the "wonder of wonders" according to F. Braudel casts a symbolic silhouette on the entire Mediterranean, allowing for the most rich and beautiful gardens in the most arid zones.

8) Pline spoke about "the exhilarating scents, in Campanile, of olive-trees in blossom and wild roses." In Turkey one says that "for the perfume of a rose, a gardener would hear thousands of thorns, with a smile on his lips".

9) earth / sea, sun / shade, inside/ outside, drought / flood...

10) Located at the crossroads of three fundamental continents for the history of man and civilisations these qualities are further enhanced. From deepest Africa, to the Far East, to the arctic Northern Europe, without forgetting the New World wave since the XVIth century, all men have encountered the Mediterranean, sailed its seas, wandered through its cities, impregnated its spaces.


12) "Cities are the text of history....", "Cities constitute a world in themselves...", "Athens is the first clear idea of urban science; it is the passageway from nature to culture." A. Rossi. L'Architettura della città, Marsilio Editori, S.P.A., Padova 1966.

13) The Greeks believed that the site of a city was to be chosen and revealed by the gods. Herodotous denounces the erection of a city by Dorian, the Spartan, as an act of piety or madness "carried out without consulting the oracle and without performing any of the prescribed ceremonies". The ancient city, Fustel de Coulanges, Flammarion, 1984.

14) "The legal history of the Mediterranean thus contains the two possible approaches related to the origin of law. Modern law and Roman law – at one time in their histories – generated the persistent temptation for men of law: that legal order be the reflection of a divine creation, and that the relation of one man to another be impregnated with the notion of God, otherwise legal order is born from everyday life and man’s aspirations for autonomy." Histoire juridique de la Mediterranée, Jeanne Ladji-Mouchette, Publications Scientifiques Tunesiennes, 1990.

15) It is perhaps a tradition inherited from nomad Mediterranean ancestors. Traditionally, nomad families destined one of their tents to the dhiaif (passenger, visitor or guest). "Hidden joy, extinct candle" is a saying from the other end of Western coasts.

16) Anthropological meaning of the word: social group gathering many families or clans linked by linguistic, ethnic and cultural bonds and generally living according to their own legal system.

17) Structure sociale de la Mediterranée, Paul Henri Stahl.

18) “From the height of a bell-tower one can always see the neighbouring bell-tower...”, sung Lluis Llach, in Catalonia.

19) Rooting turns to an original model in the case of troglodyte houses. Although they are not very numerous, they are found in small numbers and with spectacular examples, as in the case of Mitnuta in Tunisia. As Moustafa Lachen wrote in the foreword of the book by André Ravereau, "...a society [...] a civilisation [...] of the organised site for a long duration...".

20) "...in the rich green pastures one estimates that one needs three lectures per annum and per sheep. It is obvious that this unit of pasture must be more significant in the Erg...", "...for diverse reasons; the loss of a herd, significant reduction in family manpower or group, nomads become sedentary." Le Souf des oasis, Ahmed Nahl, Editions de la Maison des Livres, 1970.

21) Anthropological meaning: group of seasonal migrations, especially specific of stockbreeder societies, that benefit from spread out pastures as well as possible, going through huge territories, from plain to mountain and vice versa.