The "Mediterranean" through Arab Eyes in the Early Modern Period

From Rūmī to "White In-Between Sea"

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The Sea of Andalus, the Sea of Maghrib, the Sea of Alexandria, the Sea of Syria, the Sea of Constantinople, the Sea of the Franks, and the Sea of the Rūm [Europeans/Byzantines] . . . are one sea.

—YĀQŪT AL-ḤAMAWĪ (D. 1229), *MUʿJAM AL-BULDĀN*

The sea belongs to Christians—as it is said, the sea belongs to the Rūm.

—THE MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR ʿABDALLAH IBN ʿAISHA TO HIS FRENCH HOST IN PARIS, JEAN JOURDAN, 1699

This essay will examine Arabic writings about the Mediterranean Sea in the period after Fernand Braudel's *terminus ad quem* (1598) until Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798—the period in which European naval powers, chiefly Britain and France, came to dominate the Mediterranean basin. It focuses on the writings of the Arabic-speaking peoples who inhabited the Arab mainland (*Barr al-ʿArab*), extending from Iskanderun on the southeastern border of Turkey to Tangier, situated at the intersection of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Accordingly, it does not take into account the Turkish mainland (Anatolia; *Barr al-Turk*) or the Euro-Christian shores.[1] The reason for this Arabic focus is that, even though the Ottomans ruled the eastern and southern Mediterranean basins (excluding Morocco), Arabs and Arabic speakers constituted the largest population at sea: merchants, scholars, jurists, travelers, fishermen, pilgrims, princes, ambassadors, migrants, and families. And these Arabs held entirely different views regarding the name and significance of the sea than the Ottoman Turks. At the same time, they differed markedly from their European counterparts.

THE MEDITERRANEAN OF EUROPE

After the end of World War I, and as soon as European powers gained control of the Arab countries around the Mediterranean basin, Henry Pirenne wrote in *Muhammad and Charlemagne* that the expansion of Islam from the seventh century on had partitioned what had been a unified sea under the Roman emperors Constantine and Justinian (fourth–sixth centuries CE) into a religious space of confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Disagreeing with Pirenne, his pupil Fernand Braudel showed in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949) that trade, negotiation, travel, and diplomacy had brought Ottomans together with Frenchmen, Britons with Algerians, and Dutchmen with Aleppans in a manner that turned the sixteenth-century Mediterranean into an interactive geographic unit.[2] Braudel explained that "the movement of boats, pack animals, vehicles and people themselves made the Mediterranean a unit and gave it a certain uniformity in spite of local resistance."[3] Such Braudelian unity was possible only because by 1949, the sea and its shores had been turned into a European lake, with all the Arab countries around the basin under European or European-sponsored mandate/colonization: Morocco (France and Spain), Algeria and Tunisia (France), Libya (Italy), Egypt and Palestine (Britain and Israel), and Lebanon and Syria (France). Looking back, Braudel projected twentieth-century European navigational and commercial hegemony over the Mediterranean onto the sixteenth century, when the "northern invaders" (chiefly British and French, with the Dutch playing some role) had begun to consolidate their control over the sea.[4]

At the end of his book, however, Braudel admitted that the evidence he had used to build his case for a "unifying" Mediterranean had been limited. He had not consulted sources in Arabic or Ottoman—the languages of the southern, of the eastern, and of part of the northern shores of the Mediterranean basin—and he urged scholars to do that. One of his students, Ömer Lutfi Barkan, began studying the Mediterranean through Ottoman population and taxation records to test Braudel's theory of the unity of the Mediterranean,[5] yet half a century after Braudel, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in *The Corrupting Sea* (2000) paid no attention to the non-European sources, dealing with the history of the sea in a synchronic manner.[6] Faruk Tabak's extensive study of trade, ecology, and geography in *The Waning of the Mediterranean 1550–1870* (2008) also reflected an exclusively European epistemology of the sea, with a special focus on Venice and Genoa and on the food production (grains, wine, olives) in the hillsides and mountains beyond the Euro-Mediterranean basin. And much as David Abulafia in *The Great Sea* (2011) aimed to study both the sea itself and those who sailed its waters, what he called the "human history of the sea . . . those who dipped their toes into the sea" (more so than Braudel's people's history), he too ignored Turkish and Arabic cartography and geography.[7]

The view of the Mediterranean as a single unity and the interest in its *connectivities* (Horden and Purcell's term) has not been confined to academe. The 1995 Barcelona Process of Euro-Mediterranean partnership made the Mediterranean part of European/Western political strategy, and in 2005, the European Union "defined the Mediterranean as a strategic priority;"[8] two years later, the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, proclaimed the "unity of the Mediterranean" (later changed to the "unity for the Mediterranean" as a result of German insistence). This "unity" served to resolve historical dilemmas, as well as to confirm European hegemony:[9] it retroactively justified the European colonization of the Arab-Islamic coast in the first half of the twentieth century. At that time, Mussolini and other leaders replaced Arabic place names in North Africa with their Latin precedents, while, since their conquest of Algeria in 1830, the French had appealed to the classical past to turn Algeria into France.[10] The unity established the Mediterranean basin as a European "middle sea" of geographical and commercial connectivities, recapitulating thereby the mare nostrum of Roman imperial memory. That is how Braudel (and for that matter Albert Camus before him) could present the sea as a "humanistic Mediterranean" shared by all the peoples of the basin, from the French to the Syrians and Moroccans.[11]

Ironically, crises in the Arab-Islamic Mediterranean have begun to cast their shadow over Europe in recent years. As refugees and migrants from the Mediterranean countries have flooded into western Europe, the Mediterranean has changed in recent discourse into "an area of permanent conflict faced with immigration, inequality, racism and impassable frontiers," as the brochure for "Between Myth and Fright: The Mediterranean as Conflict," a 2016 exhibition at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, demonstrates. It seems that the idea of a "unified" Mediterranean no longer serves the ideological goals of European governments, which now would prefer that it serve as a *ḥājiz* (barrier) between them and the desperate refugees in their ships of death.[12]

THE ARABS AND THE "MEDITERRANEAN"

The European construction of a Mediterranean of connectivities was made possible by the fact that the European colonial conceptualization of the Mediterranean completely ignored Arabic writings and Arab voices—even though over half the Mediterranean basin in the early modern period was populated by Arabic speakers with their own histories, chronicles, travelogues, and nomenclatures of the sea. Had Arabic sources been examined, they would have shown that the conceptualization of the Mediterranean as a unifying basin not only was not present but was also widely contested, which is why Arab writers used different names for the sea but never the "In-Between Sea" of Roman Latin derivation. The name *al-Mutawassiṭ,* or In-Between, does not appear on any of the medieval maps that have survived,[13] and as Tarek Kahlaoui has shown, *al-Mutawassiṭ* was rarely used

in chronicles or geographical texts.[14] Rather, names such as *Rūmī* (Byzantine Sea),[15] *Shāmī* (Syrian Sea), *Akhḍar* (Green Sea), *Māliḥ* (Salty Sea), and others dominate the cartographic and historical nomenclature (along with *Qubṭī* [Coptic Sea] on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ottoman maps).[16]

Actually, as far back as the tenth century, al-Masʿūdī (d. CE 956), one of the greatest Arab travelers and historiographers, showed in his *Murūj al-dhahab* and *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf* that the name most frequently associated with the Mediterranean Sea was *Rūmī.* The sea belonged and was named after the adversarial "other." The Mediterranean as a sea unifying the peoples and civilizations around it did not appear in Arabic because the sea was many seas with many names reflecting many and different peoples. It was also a sea of danger because, as Arabs moved their boats and pack animals (in the words of Braudel), they saw a Rūmī/European mare nostrum, which brought on them naval attacks and invasions. The "Mediterranean" Sea made up of an "immense network of regular and casual connections," as Braudel imagined it, did not exist.[17] Arab geographers also did not recognize the sea as "part of *Mamlakat al-Islam*"/the dominion of Islam. Rather, it was a "disappearing Muslim space that was being challenged by the *Rūm*,"[18] a multiplicity of regional seas with the Rūm assuming control over it.[19] Actually, as historian Shams al-Dīn al-Kīlanī has noted, it was the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea that were viewed by Muslim Arabs as extensions of the Islamic *barr* (region), and not the Rūmī Sea.[20] After all, the only sea associated with the Arabs is the Arabian Sea near the Indian Ocean.

In addition, the medieval Arabic view of the sea was that of a space separating, rather than connecting, two adversarial shores:[21] a *ḥājiz* (barrier) between *bilād al-Rūm* and *bilād Miṣr*, or a defensive space between the lands of the Europeans and of the Egyptians, as the thirteenth-century Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī put it.[22] Clearly, after Genoese and Venetian ships started carrying crusader armies to the East, al-Ḥamawī could not but hope that the sea would serve as a defense against the invaders. The atlas of the Tunisian al-Sharafī al-Ṣifāqī produced two centuries later in 1551, along with its subsequent renditions, has no name for the sea, even though the maps were intended as a "reconstruction of political landscape."[23] It is possible that as Spain and the Ottoman Empire were vying for control of the Mediterranean, the Ṣifāqī cartographers used neither a Spanish nor a Turkish designation for the sea because they did not know how to name it. After Yūsuf ibn ʿĀbid al-Fāsī traveled in 1587 along the Atlantic coast of Morocco, he launched eastward on his journey to Yemen, using the coastal road near what he called simply *al-Baḥr al-Māliḥ* (the Salty Sea), a name that dates as far back as al-Idrīsī (d. 1161) and Ibn al-Athīr (ca. 1234).[24] His compatriots warned him, however, to stay inland, since the Rūm came from the sea to hunt for Muslims (*yataṣayyadū li-l-muslimīn*) on land.[25] Common to him and to other Muslims was the image of the sea as terrifying, not because Arabs and Muslims had a religiously engrained or an instinctive hostility to the sea,[26] but because they feared attacks from European fleets and pirates.
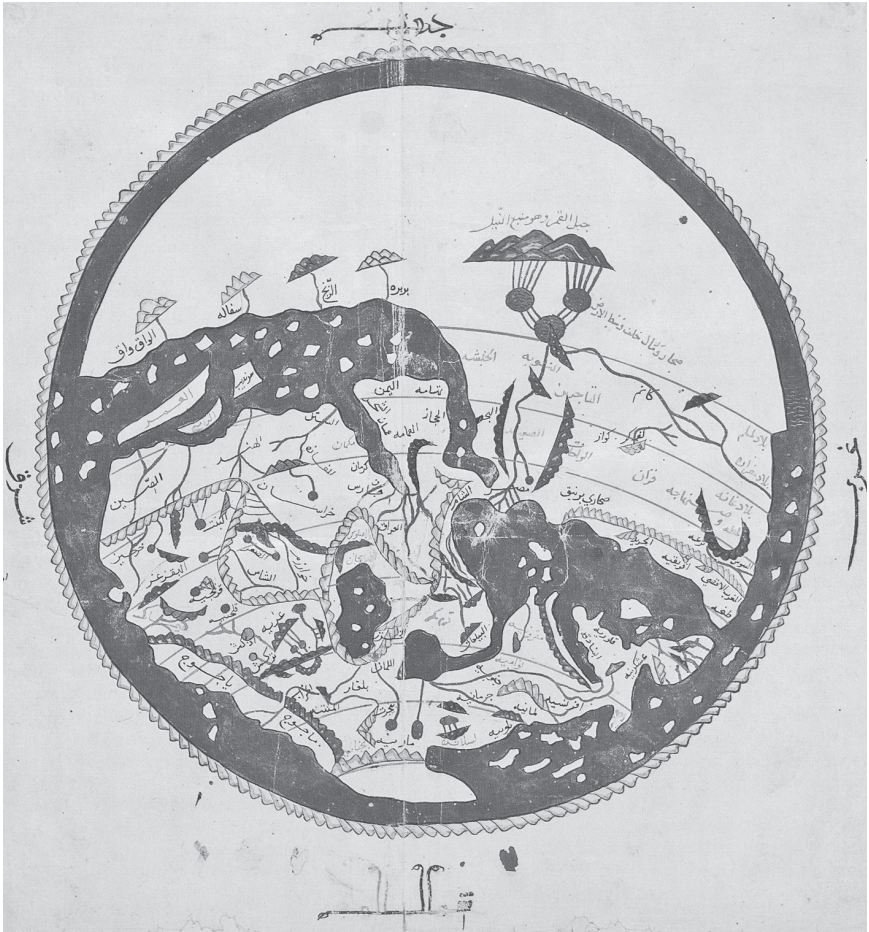
FIGURE 1. *Al-Idrisi's World Map.* Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The attacks had been relentless. From 1415 on, North African port cities had been conquered and occupied by Europeans: Ceuta (1415) and Melilla (1497), both of which remain in Spanish hands today; Asila and Tangier (1471), occupied by the Portuguese, with the latter in British hands until 1684; Santa Cruz/Agadir (1505–41), occupied by the Portuguese; Tripoli (1510), attacked first by the Spanish and then by the Knights of Malta (1530); Mazagan/El Jadida (1502–1769), occupied by the Portuguese; Azemmour (1513–41), occupied by the Portuguese; Tunis (1535), attacked and occupied by Spain until 1574; Algiers (1661), attacked by the British; Jijel, Algeria (1664), attacked by the French; Tripoli, attacked by the British (Libya,

1675); and Algiers, bombarded by the French (1682, 1683, 1688). From July 1 to 16, 1688, the French navy, according to a report by an Englishman, blasted the city of Algiers with 10,420 bombs.[27] Europeans not only conquered these outposts but also Christianized them, holding processions with the Virgin Mary (in Catholic outposts) that marked physical and spiritual possession.[28] Throughout the period, pirates and colonists of all European nationalities seized North African men, women, and children for domestic and transatlantic slavery. ʿAli ibn Muḥammad al-Tamjrūtī sailed from Tetuan to Istanbul in 1590 and, as did his contemporaries, worried about danger at sea. His account is the only pre–late eighteenth-century travelogue that has survived in Arabic of such a journey from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, but in it he has neither a conception of a larger, or unified, "Mediterranean" nor indeed even a name for the sea. Although he had access to a map/ṣūra "of the sea, [drawn] on animal skin with names on both sides of the sea," he did not pick up from this portolan map the name of the sea but focused instead on coastal names.[29] Al-Tamjrūtī mentioned *al-Baḥr al-Aswad*/the Black Sea and *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*/the Atlantic, and consistent with other Arab writers who gave the sea a local name, he referred to *Baḥr Tanja*/the Sea of Tangier.[30] Sailing from Tetuan, al-Tamjrūtī made numerous references to Christian pirates, whose nationalities he did not know.[31] In this context of sea fear, al-Tamjrūtī told the story of a man from Darʿa in Morocco, who so feared European pirates that he decided to migrate inland to a region where its people did not even know what a sea was.[32]

British and French naval attacks so frightened the North Africans that they moved away from the sea coast. After British admiral Robert Blake bombarded Tunis in April 1655, the bey wrote that Muslims had their subsistence from the land and did not expect help from the sea.[33] English diplomat Sir William Temple (d. 1699) confirmed that "for many Years they [North Africans] hardly pretend to any Successes on that Element [sea], but commonly say [that] *God has given the Earth to the Mussulmans, and the Sea to the Christians.*"[34] In 1699, Mulay Ismāʿīl of Morocco (r. 1672–1727) wrote a letter to James II, the exiled king of England in Paris, saying that had he not been an "an Arab" belonging to "a people who knew nothing of the sea," he would have sent him a fleet to help invade Britain and regain his throne.[35] Although Morocco had a long coastline, and although in the first half of the seventeenth century Saletian pirates had caused havoc on European shipping, neither Morocco nor, for that matter, any of the Ottoman regencies were able to advance their naval and maritime technology to repel the attacks by the *inglīz, ʿajam,* and *franṣīṣ* (English, Spanish, and French).[36]

North African pirates and privateers spread fear among European travelers and coastal inhabitants, from Italy to England and from Ireland to Iceland.[37] But what was different between the Europeans and the North Africans in their maritime aggressions was that the latter confined themselves to the abduction of captives and to hit-and-run raids, as opposed to the former, who permanently enslaved

Muslims (sometimes sending them off to North and South America) at the same time that they were establishing what they hoped would be permanent colonies on North African soil. Furthermore, their fleets bombarded port cities with weapons that were unmatched by their North African counterparts. No fleet in North Africa developed the high-powered naval projectiles or guns that could bomb European coastal cities in the manner that the British and the French fleets bombed Muslim ports, destroyed their shipping, burnt their food supplies, and sank their fishing vessels.

The North African failure at sea was a result of a steady decline in navigation, ship-building, and cartography.[38] Such decline helps to explain the absence of any uniformity in the Arabic conceptualization of the sea. Aḥmad ibn Qāsim, an Andalusian who fled to Morocco at the end of the sixteenth century, served as translator and emissary in the Saʿdian court in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Although he was exposed to European maps and atlases, as he mentions in his memoir, he still described the sea that surrounded Africa from the north as the "Small" Sea and the Rūmī Sea.[39] Muḥammad ibn ʿabd al-Rafīʿ al-Andalusī, another Andalusian who fled to Tunisia, viewed all the sea coast as belonging to the *Rūm: sāḥil al-baḥr kulluhu li-l-Rūm.*[40] Although the seventeenth-century chronicler of al-Andalus al-Maqqarī (d. 1631) is the only writer in the period under study to use the designation *mutawassiṭ*,[41] he most frequently referred to *al-Baḥr al-Shāmī (*the Syrian Sea)—having traveled to and lived in Syria. A quarter of a century later, in 1663, the Moroccan traveler Abū Sālim alʿAyyāshī recounted how he and his companions arrived in Damietta by way of *Baḥr al-Rūm.* There they rented a ship to take them across a *buḥayra* (lake) but were terrified when they saw some Naṣārā (Christians) on board the ship. Fortunately these Christians were peaceful, and they all parted "amicably."[42] For him, the sea was the Salty (*Māliḥ*) Sea,[43] as it was for his contemporary, Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khiyārī, who wrote of the Salty Sea that led not only to Alexandria but, more ominously, to the "lands of the infidels."[44] In his compendium of seventeenth-century biographies, Muḥammad Amīn ibn Faḍlallah al-Muḥibbī (d. 1699) gave no name to the sea. The approximately fourteen hundred biographies he included range in length from a few lines to multiple pages and describe a huge amount of travel and mobility. Interestingly, cities on the sea's coastline appear very infrequently: Gaza in *al-diyār al-muqaddasa* (the Holy Lands),[45] and Tripoli in Lebanon (and even less so Tripoli in Libya). But in all his account, al-Muḥibbī never names the sea, mentioning only the danger of captivity in Malta.[46] Others gave the sea different names. The historian of Tunis Ibn Abī Dīnar (d. ca. 1698) called the sea between Tunis and Sicily *Baḥr Ifrīqiya* (Sea of Tunis), seemingly dissociating it from the other seas,[47] and in the next century, the chronicler Aḥmad al-Damurdāshī (ca. 1755) mentioned that a certain Jarkas Muḥammad Bayk had fled from the Egyptian delta toward the Libyan city of Derna on the coast of *al-Baḥr al-Māliḥ* (Salty Sea), after

which he boarded a Russian ship to *Mosco*.[48] The Tunisian Ḥammūdah ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 1788), wrote of *Baḥr al-Shām,* the sea in which *mālik al-Mosco* (the king of the Russians) raided British and French ships and captured Tunisians on board them.[49] In the nineteenth–century Būlāq edition of the *Arabian Nights,*[50] al-Baḥr al-Māliḥ and *Baḥr al-ʿAjam* (non-Arabs) appear together in the stories about Muslim captivity in Italy.[51] From the sea, came the danger of abduction and forcible conversion to Christianity.[52]

Muslim fear of European sea attacks was also felt in the Mashriq. The Druze prince Fakhr al-Dīn, fleeing from Mount Lebanon to Italy in 1613, encountered the *qurṣān,* an Arabic transliteration of "corsairs," as he and his retinue sailed aboard one French ship and two Flemish ones. Later, his secretary wrote an account describing "their travel by sea" from Sidon to Livorno, a journey that took fifty-three days, but at no point did he record the name of the sea.[53] By the time the prince was sailing, the eastern Mediterranean was no longer as effectively protected by the Ottoman fleet as it had been in the previous century. European pirates, from Malta all the way to England, roamed the shipping zone between Alexandria and Izmir, at the same time that they attacked the Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian coasts. The autobiography of the Spanish Maltese pirate Alosno de Contrera describes the havoc that he and his ships wrought in all parts of the Mediterranean in the early seventeenth century, while the hundreds of Arabic documents about European piracy in the Egyptian archives describe the plight of Muslim captives seized by European marauders and record the failure of the Ottoman navy to provide adequate protection to commercial and pilgrimage shipping.[54]

Meanwhile, Arab writers and sailors continued to debate the name of the sea. The Syrian chronicler Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf al-Qaramānī (d. 1610) mentioned that the Palestinian cities of ʿAsqalān and ʿAkkā were located on *al-Baḥr al-Shāmī,*[55] and while traveling from Mecca to Istanbul in 1629, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallah al-Ḥusaynī explained that *al-Baḥr al-Rūmī* was really *Baḥr al-Shām wa-l-Qustantīniyya; Baḥr al-Shām,* he added, was the sea near Iskandarūn.[56] In his chronicle about Egypt and its Ottoman rulers, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʿṭi al-Isḥāqī (d. 1649) described how the Nile poured into *al-Baḥr al-Rūmī,* near the city of Rashīd, where the sea was known as *Baḥr al-Gharb* (Western Sea).[57] An anonymous manuscript copied in 1655 (and edited thirty years later) showed the Nile starting in Jabal al-Qamar and ending in *al-Baḥr al-Māliḥ.*[58] The Sufi traveler Muṣṭafa Asʿad al-Luqaymī (d. 1764) knew every shrine and holy site in *al-arḍ al-muqadass*a (holy land), at the west of which was the "Sea of the Rūm, which is the Salty Sea."[59]

Although there was little Turkish intellectual influence on Arabic geographical writings, a few authors used the Turkish designation *Aq Denizi* (White Sea),[60] as in the case of the Syrian cartographer Abū Bakr al-Dimashqī, who translated Willem Blaeu's atlas for the Ottoman court in Istanbul in the second half of the seventeenth

century.[61] The Tunisian vizier Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Andalusī al-Wazīr al-Sarrāj writing in early eighteenth-century Tunis, used the term *al-Baḥr al-Abyaḍ* (White Sea), which, as he explained, was adjacent to *al-Baḥr al-Aswad* (Black Sea).[62] The name *Baḥr Safīd* appears prominently on Ibrāhīm Mutafarriqa's 1731 map (the first printed map in the Ottoman Empire), which depicts Egypt and Palestine. A (Catholic) Christian translator of a Turkish ambassador's account of a visit to France in 1720 used the name *al-Baḥr al-Abyaḍ,* as did the Greek Orthodox author and translator of an account about Russia in 1758.[63] But another Christian author borrowed from a 1629 travelogue by the Moroccan Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallah al-Ḥusaynī that Alexandria was located near *al-Baḥr al-Shāmī.*[64] The Iraqi Catholic priest Ḥanna al-Mūṣallī, sailing from Iskanderun to Venice on board an English ship, made no mention of the sea at all. Later, when he sailed to the Spanish port of San Sebastian from France, he said that he crossed *al-Baḥr al-Gharbī* (Western Sea); and, after continuing by land to Barcelona, he commented that the city was located on *al-Baḥr al-Sharqī* (Eastern Sea).[65] Surprisingly, he did not seem to have picked up the term *Mediterranean* from his European hosts but rather used names that had been common in Arabic for centuries. Writing to an Arabic-speaking readership, he may have felt that the names that were familiar to them would be much more recognizable than European names.[66] Patriarch Mīkhāʾīl Brayk, writing from Aleppo in the second half of the eighteenth century, initially mentioned only *Baḥr Qasbiyān* (Caspian Sea), but when writing closer to his Syrian home, he described how *qurṣān al-baḥr* (sea pirates) attacked the Palestinian port of Jaffa and committed many deeds (ʿ*amilū aʿmālan*), including the seizure of two small ships. That the local populace then attacked and looted *Dayr al-Ifranj* (Monastery of the Franks) indicates that these pirates were Christian.[67]

Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahāb al-Miknāsī, the most traveled of early modern Arabic writers, wrote detailed accounts about his three journeys across the Mediterranean Sea and into the lands of the Christians and the Muslims. On his 1779 crossing from Ceuta to Cadiz, the only name he had for the sea was *al-Baḥr al-Saghīr* (Small Sea), which poured into *al-Baḥr al-Kabīr* (Great Sea, or the Atlantic).[68] Even after he visited Malta, Sicily, and the kingdom of Naples between 1781 and 1782, and after his third journey, by way of Sicily, to the Ottoman court in 1785, he had not picked up the name "Mediterranean" from his European hosts. Always sailing on board European ships into European ports, and fearing European pirates, al-Miknāsī could not but call the sea *Baḥr al-Rūm.*[69] A few years later, circa 1796, the Moroccan historian Abū al-Qāsim al-Zayānī—a friend and rival of al-Miknāsī's—wrote *al-Tarjumāna al-kubrā,* in which he viewed the sea as threefold: *Baḥr al-Maghrib, Baḥr al-Shām*, and *Baḥr al-Rūm*.

> [It] begins in the fourth *iqlīm* [climate zone] and is called *Baḥr al-Zuqāq* [Sea of the Strait] because it is eighteen miles wide. It then proceeds east in the direction of *arḍ al-Barbar* [land of the Berbers] and the north of *al-Maghrib al-Aqsa* [the farthest

Maghrib] until it reaches *al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ* [middle Maghrib] and connects with *arḍ Ifrīqiya* [Tunisia] and *Wadī al-Raml* [Valley of Sand]. It continues to *arḍ Barqā* [Libya] and *arḍ Lūqā wa Marāqiya* [Malta?]—to *al-Iskandarīyya* [Alexandria] and the northern part of *arḍ al-Tīh* [Sinai] and from there to *Filasṭīn* [Palestine] and the rest of the coasts of *Shām* until it reaches *Suwaydiyya* [in Syria?]. There it turns back toward *al-Maghrib.* It links up with the Constantinian Gulf, and the island of *Bilonch* [Mount Bilonch?] and *Kashmīl,* continuing to *Ardant*[?]. From there, it continues to the Gulf of Venice and links up with the Sicilian *majāz* [corridor/strait] unto *Bilād Rūmiyya* [land of the Rūm] and *Bilād Seqobyā* [land of the Slavs] and *Aryonā* [?]. It passes by the mountains of *Yūnān* [Greece] and East Andalusia where in the south it reaches the two islands where it had started.[70]

Such multiplicity of seas recalls the seas on the globe that Gerhard Mercator constructed in 1541. But Mercator could "see" a unified sea on the globe in his hands in a manner that the Moroccan did not, even though al-Zayānī was an experienced and knowledgeable traveler, who was able to read maps (*al-karīta*) and determine the location of his ship.[71] He knew French (and possibly Spanish)[72] and had read the major travelogues by Arab writers (although nothing by Europeans). He traveled with his books, which he constantly consulted. He knew the ports from Tetuan to Izmir and seemed familiar, if in a limited manner, with Marseille and some other European ports. Throughout his travels, al-Zayānī tried to verify information, so he corrected whatever errors he encountered. Yet as he described his travel by sea, or mentioned episodes that occurred at sea, the two names he used most frequently for the sea were "Green" and "Syrian." Al-Zayānī picked up some Turkish terms after spending time in the Ottoman east, but, oddly, he never used the Turkish designation of "White Sea" in all his account, which spans half a century.

Neither did al-Zayānī describe the sea as a unifier or a connector but rather as a barrier, positing that the sea had been dug purposely to serve as a *ḥājiz* between North Africa and the Iberian mainland. Originally, he stated, drawing on al-Idrīsī's *Nuzhat al-mushtāq,* there had been no sea between these two landmasses; instead, they had been contiguous.[73] As a result, North African Berbers (and al-Zayānī was proud of his Berber background) frequently attacked Iberia. To prevent the Berbers from defeating the Iberians, Alexander the Great brought his army and carved a watery separation between the two regions, so that the Western Sea (Atlantic) opened onto the Green Sea. By doing so, Alexander created a sea of separation.

Neither al-Zayānī nor any other early modern Arabic writers used the European nomenclature of the "In-Between" Mediterranean Sea, because they had no sense of possessing it (in Stephen Greenblatt's use of the term) in the manner that Europeans did.[74] In this respect, they were much unlike the British, who, early in the seventeenth century, decided to name (or to agree on a name for) the sea the "Mediterranean Sea"; the British gave it a name because their ships and fleets had already

roamed that sea. Thus, in March 1620, Trinity House merchants declared that "The Mediterranean Sea . . . [begins] at the Strait of Gibraltar or Morocco and extends to Malaga, Alicante, the Isles of Majorca, Minorca, Zante, Candy, Cyprus, Sacndarowne, Tripoli and Alexandria, and is called the Levant Sea, and has ever been so known to navigators of those countries."[75] Power over the sea empowered the naming of the sea as a single unit—so writers from William Shakespeare to John Donne began to use "Mediterranean," even if they were not fully aware of its geographic location. Only those with power could impose unity on the sea and name it, and only those with sturdy ships could make connectivities across that sea.

The Arabs had neither power nor European-like ships, and, therefore, they could not furnish a uniform name or conceive of a uniform sea. Thus, travelers and geographers from the Arabic-speaking lands gave many names to the sea, or, very often, no name at all. This absence of both conceptualization and naming, and the fact that Arab authors viewed the Mediterranean as a sea of separation (and feared it as a zone of Rūmī dangers), should not obscure the fact that there were constant contacts among Muslims, eastern Christians, Jews, and western Christians around the shores of that sea. Indeed, the sea (or seas) was commercially and economically important to the peoples of *Barr al-ʿArab*. There may also have been some cultural borrowings—after all, the story told by al-Tamjrūtī about the man and the sea oar was long before told about Odysseus.[76] And in the world of trade and commerce, there was a significant jurisprudence aimed directly at the seas: *fiqh al-biḥār*.[77] Moreover, one Arabic text shows that the sea was being studied, as well as sailed: in 1747, the Algerian navigator Ibn Ḥamadūsh wrote that he had gathered "all that I have learned [about sea routes] from the science of *al-bulūt* (portolan)." He added that he examined a *carta* of sea winds, in which he used a *qūnās* (compass) with which to draw a circle.[78] Yet as much as he was adopting foreign words instead of Arabic (*carta* instead of *ṣūra,* the common term in Arabic cartography), and much as he was reliant on non-Arabic sources, he still did not have a name for the sea.

If there were any connectivities for the Arabs around the Mediterranean basin, they were connectivities made possible by European shipping. France, Britain, Spain, and other European countries relied on the Mediterranean Sea for trade and diplomacy because they were constantly at war with each other and therefore could not rely on the land routes in the European mainland for mobility. The Mediterranean became not only the safest route but also the only one, and while there was the danger of the "Barbary corsairs," once European fleets attained military superiority over the corsairs from the second half of the seventeenth century on, they assumed dominance over the sea. Meanwhile, the Arabs found themselves either relying on European ships for their travel and trade or using land routes that avoided the sea. On land, and while there was always the danger of Bedouin robbers, Arab travelers did not face physical or political obstacles (such as different

national authorities) in the manner of an English merchant traveling overland from Amsterdam to Genoa. In contrast, at no time in the period under study could a Moroccan or an Egyptian pilgrim, merchant, scholar, or ambassador cross from Tangier to Beirut, or from Istanbul to London, or from Marseille to Alexandria, in a ship built by his own countrymen and manned by his coreligionists. Only a Frenchman, Dutchman, or Englishman could sail from the English Channel through the Straits of Gibraltar to Marmara, Jaffa, or Alexandria on board his own people's ship; and only they could hold a physical globe of the world in their hands, trace their fingers over the Mediterranean, and actually "see" the coastlines and harbors and regions. While it may have been a humdrum experience for an Arab to journey from Spain to Egypt during medieval times (according to Goitein's analysis of the Geniza documents, cited by Horden and Purcell),[79] it was no longer so by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. No globes showing Arabic names for the seas or for other parts of the world were made in that period: no Arab could "see" the sea unless he had access to European globes. And while Palmira Brummett is correct in stating that the Mediterranean was a "sea that one could sail all the way around, sometimes facing west and sometimes facing east,"[80] only a European could have done that.

For the Arabic-speaking peoples, the sea remained a plurality of seas plagued by European dangers and, therefore, not "their" sea "in-between" their lands. By the end of the period under study, their commercial and naval fleets had deteriorated, and they could no longer confront the growing power of France and Britain. Furthermore, and while the Arabic-speaking peoples from Tangier to Iskenderun traveled and traded in the Mediterranean, their knowledge of the sea and its Rūmī people remained sporadic, unsystematic, and episodic. It never rivaled the European records of reconnaissance and intelligence that were printed in the centers of imperial power, the studies of tides and navigation routes in the Mediterranean basin, the travelers' accounts of fauna and flora from Algeria to Palestine, the ambassadors' insights about political rivalries and social fissures from Meknas to Istanbul, or captives' accounts about the hinterlands—from the Atlas Mountains to the Arabian deserts, and even to Mecca and Medina, as was the case in the account by the English convert Joseph Pitts (1704). As a result, Arabs in the Mashriq and in the Maghrib turned their attention toward the Islamic regions that they could reach by land: a Moroccan from the Maghrib could travel from Tangier to Jerusalem, Mosul, or Mecca without ever crossing a sea. That is why there is no early modern text or map in Arabic that designates the Mediterranean Sea as *mutawassiṭ,* with a network of "connectivity" tying the three continents around the basin together and making it "a shared Mediterranean political sphere." Small-scale contacts between "short distances and definite places" do not produce a large-scale unity or a conceptualization of the Mediterranean as a contiguous basin—at least not in the Arabic sources.[81]

If the Mediterranean was a "frontier," as Linda T. Darling has argued, it was a frontier that the Europeans, not the inhabitants of *Barr al-ʿArab*, were pushing and controlling.[82] With their naval superiority and advanced military capability, the Rūm not only imposed their hegemony over the sea but also confirmed its Latin name as their in-between sea. By the time al-Zayānī was writing, French and British naval powers had overcome all their North African rivals and had assumed Mediterranean dominance. For him, the Mediterranean became a dangerous waterway that brought and continued to bring European fleets and colonizers to *Barr al-ʿArab*: he was still alive when France invaded Algeria in 1830 (he died in 1833). The Mediterranean was not, and therefore was not described as, a sea of connectivities or an in-between sea. Rather, it was a sea of the invading Rūm.

AL-BAḤR AL-ABYAḌ AL-MUTAWASSIṬ, THE WHITE IN-BETWEEN SEA

The nineteenth century witnessed a significant shift in Arabic terminology of the sea, as both Ottoman and European nomenclature began to find currency in Arabic, especially after the French invention of the Mediterranean in the wake of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt.[83] In 1802, a geographical treatise by Chrysanthus Notaras, originally published in Paris in 1715, was translated into Arabic. The translator wrote that the sea was known as the "Middle [sea]/*wasīṭ,* that is the White Sea"—the two names used in European and Turkish cartographies, respectively.[84] This reference is the first that combines the two names—those names that will become the official name of the Mediterranean in modern Arabic geography.

Describing his journey to Paris between 1826 and 1831, Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī recalled crossing "the Sea of the *Rūm,* which is known as the *al-Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ*/ In-Between Sea or *al-Baḥr al-Abyaḍ*/ the White Sea."[85] Al-Ṭahṭāwī was the first Arab writer (not translator) from the Mashriq to use the two names—"white" and "in-between"—that Arabs eventually came to accept. A few years later, in 1835, an anonymous Maronite chronicler from Lebanon used the designation *abyaḍ* for the sea,[86] but about two decades later, a writer from the Maghrib used *al-Mutawassiṭ.* Traveling to Marseille on board a French ship, Muḥammad al-Saffār started by writing about the "*al-Baḥr al-Ṣaghīr*/Small Sea, since it faced the ocean, which they call big." Later, when he thought of his French destination, he explained that the sea was "*al-Baḥr al-Rūmī* because of the many *Rūmī* countries on its shores." What was Rūmī in his side of the basin, he continued, became "*al-Baḥr al-Shāmī* when it reached the shores of *bilād al-Shām.* And thus it was known as *al-Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ,*" the In-Between Sea, because it separated the Rūm from Bilād al-Shām.[87]

A few years later, in 1850, an ambassador from Algeria visited France, and notwithstanding twenty years of French occupation of his country, he wrote of *al-Baḥr al-Māliḥ.*[88] In 1860, the Moroccan Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Fāsi

sailed to England at a time when the seas were completely controlled by Europeans. As he boarded the steamship, he realized that Muslims no longer had anything to do with the sea. Puzzling over this imbalance of power, he rationalized that since these Europeans, who were infidels, would never make it to paradise, God in his infinite mercy had compensated them by giving them paradise on earth: "a garden that extends from *al-Baḥr al-Muhīṭ* in al-Andalus to the bay of Constantinople." The only conception he had of the Mediterranean, then, was that it was a reward given by God to the Europeans.[89] In 1873, the Beirut-based *al-Jinān* journal mentioned *Baḥr Safīd* and *Baḥr al-Rūm;* five years later,[90] the widely traveled Muhammad Bayram al-Tūnisī wrote a description of the world, but for him the sea (Tunis being under Ottoman rule) was still the "White Sea."[91] In 1899, and writing in New York, Yūsuf Naʿmān Maʿlūf used the phrase *al-Baḥr al-Mutawasiṭ al-Rūmī*,[92] and in 1905, the Anglican-trained Palestinian minister Asʿad Manṣūr wrote the first Arabic dictionary of the Bible, in which he located the Holy Land east of *Baḥr al-Rūm.* Two years later, ʿIsā Iskandar al-Maʿlūf wrote from Lebanon a biographical dictionary of the Maʿlūf family, in which he also used *Baḥr al-Rūm*.[93] At the same time, Najīb ʿAbdou, who wrote from the United States, used the same term—even though the English-language map he reproduced from Thomas Cook used "the Mediterranean, Egypt, the Nile and Palestine."[94] Another Lebanese emigrant, Amīn Rīḥānī, also used *Baḥr al-Rūm,*[95] but on February 2, 1908, the Palestinian author Khalīl Sakākīnī, writing in New York, used *al-Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ*.[96] In 1913, the priest Basil Kherbawi, also in New York, wrote about "*Baḥr al-Rūm* **or** *Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ*" (emphasis added).[97] In 1923, the Egyptian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī wrote "*al-Baḥr al-Rūmī ʿal-Baḥr al-Abyaḍ al-Mutawassiṭ*,"[98] and, a year later, Manṣūr used *al-Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ*.[99]

If the "historiography of the twentieth century . . . created the idea of the Mediterranean as a space of continuity,"[100] as Claudia Esposito maintains, then it was the imperial European powers that gave currency to its name in Arabic: Mediterranean/*al-Mutawassiṭ*. Only in the first part of the twentieth century did the "unity" of the Mediterranean Sea begin to take shape in Arabic nomenclature—after the completion of European domination of *Barr-al-ʿArab*. Only then did the In-Between/ Mediterranean/Mutawassiṭ name of the sea become geographically established after centuries of confusion, uncertainty, and contestation. And since the Ottoman Empire had ruled Barr al-ʿArab for hundreds of years, it too inserted its own designation. Thus was born of those two imperial parents that Siamese twin: "The White In-Between Sea"/*al-Baḥr al-Abyaḍ al-Mutawassiṭ*.[101]

NOTES

Epigraphs: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, "Baḥr al-Andalus wa Baḥr al-Maghrib wa Baḥr al-Iskandariyya wa Baḥr al-Shām wa Baḥr al-Qusṭanṭīniyya wa Baḥr al-Ifranj wa Baḥr al-Rūm . . . jamīʿuha baḥr wāḥid," in ʿAbdallah Ibrāhīm, *ʿĀlam al-qurūn al-wusṭā fī aʿyun al-muslimīn* [The world of the middle centuries in