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MAIN SECTION

Convergence and Divergence in Mediterranean Port Cities

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Mediterranean region and its port cities is crucial in understanding the origin and development of many modern societies. These cities have always been characterized by their interdependent relationships, forming an essential part of a system of crucial regional and international routes, made possible and enriched by the sea. Simultaneously, these cities have been able to preserve their urban values while continuously adapting to new requirements and circumstances, making them ideal case studies of urban resilience. Despite their decisive role in the emergence of the global economic system, these cities have received little attention from the humanities and social sciences. This article aims to consider the Mediterranean port cities in relation to their historical context, their urban model, and their intrinsic and shared conditions. For this purpose, a narrative literature review is developed, with reference authors on this topic. Additionally, fiction resources are explored as a complementary research method based on the intersections between description and invention in three projects focused on the Mediterranean region and its port cities.

Introduction

According to Kären Wigen,[1] the history of the Mediterranean region, and particularly its port cities, is essential to understanding the origin and development of many modern societies. Since ancient times, these cities have been characterized by their interdependent relationships, made possible and enhanced by the sea, as part of a larger system of urban centres, important regional and international routes, nodal points, and lines of force.[2] They have also been characterized by their ability to find a balance between the preservation of their urban values and the adaptation to external requirements and influences,[3] making them paradigmatic case studies of urban resilience in recent processes of globalization.[4] Despite their pivotal role in the emergence of the global economic system and their status as significant examples of urban resilience, these cities have received limited attention from the humanities and social sciences.[5]

The objective of this article is to investigate Mediterranean port cities in terms of their history, what defines them as an urban model, and their inherent, shared characteristics. To achieve this, we aim to adopt an exploratory and multidisciplinary approach, combining references from the humanities, particularly history and urban history, with fields such as anthropology and sociology. We'll also draw from the realm of fiction, as we believe that this cross-pollination of diverse perspectives will yield a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis.

In the first part, we present a narrative literature review that encompasses references from authors from various academic backgrounds and disciplines. In this part, we delve into the port city model and its intricate relationship with the sea. We also examine the ship's dual nature as both a cultural artifact and architecture. In the second part, we explore the potential of fiction as a complementary research tool, underscoring the capacity for interdisciplinary interaction between science and art in the comprehension and representation of these subjects. The article then takes shape by examining three fictional precedents, three journeys centered around the Mediterranean. These narratives allow us to view these cities from a relational perspective, considering their connection with the sea and their interplay among various urban settlements, where the port serves as a pivotal intermediary.

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1   Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Kären Wigen. *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

2   Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

3   Henk Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered," *History and Anthropology 16, no. 1 (2005):* 129-141.

4   Fortuna De Rosa and Maria Di Palma, "Historic Urban Landscape Approach and Port Cities Regeneration: Naples between Identity and Outlook," *Sustainability* 5, no. 10 (2013): 4268-4287.

5   Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities".
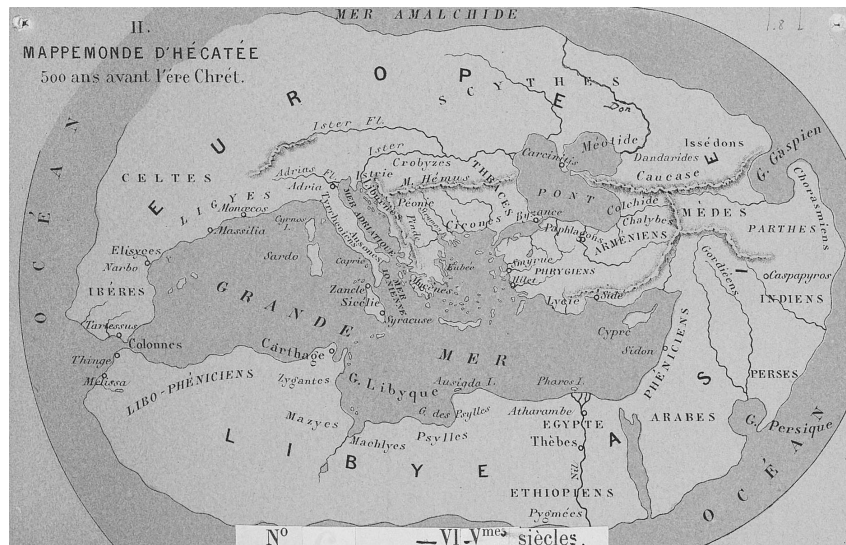
The white middle sea

Vivien de Saint-Martin, Reconstruction of Hecataeus' World Map 500BC. Source: https://blog.bge-geneve.ch/musee-cartographique/

Dame el mazál e ecame a la mar
[Wish me good luck and throw me into the sea]
Ladino saying

Al-Bahr al-al-Abyad Mutawassit is the Arabic name for the Mediterranean, which literally means "the Middle White Sea." This body of water has had a long-standing historical significance in connecting the three ancient continents. Positioned at the very heart of the known world, this centrality is exemplified by Hecataeus' map dating back to 500 BC (Fig.1). During the archaic period, the Mediterranean played a central role in shaping social dynamics and world relations, associated with civilization itself. In the words of Michel Gras: "the closer someone is to the sea, the closer they are to the heart of civilization".[6]

Several urban centres have developed around it through commercial exchanges as well as the circulation of people and ideas. In the case of the western Mediterranean, as Braudel mentions,[7] it is clear that the major cities were all located by the sea, the most important route of all. It is in these interdependent relationships, which have progressively intensified, that the richness of the Mediterranean lies, and which will have consequences in all fields of social, religious, and economic life in the region.[8] Braudel discusses a human unity of the Mediterranean,[9] resulting from a network of land and sea routes, urban centres, and communication lines.

6   Michel Gras, *El Mediterráneo Arcaico* (Madrid: Alderabán, 1999), 7.

7   Braudel, *Mediterranean.*

8   Gras, *Mediterráneo Arcaico.*

9   Braudel, *Mediterranean.*

However, the sea that connects also separates. According to Henk Driessen,[10] the accelerated process of European Community integration, the abolition of internal borders, and the reinforcement of external borders have accentuated the division of these populations. A political and economic abyss has formed on its margins, as well as an ideological barrier, perceived by the contrast between democracy and totalitarianism, between secularism and a political-religious model, which has boosted a growing exodus from south to north.

Mediterranean port cities

FIG. 2   Izmir quay, Turkey c.1920. Source: https://www.loc.gov/item/2009633138/

There has been a historical trend towards the concentration of people, power, and social and cultural capital in port cities, a process that still occurs today.[11] Port cities such as Izmir, Alexandria, Athens, Algiers, Beirut, Tel Aviv, Naples, Genoa, Marseille, or Barcelona are places where land use is very intense and where important regional, national, and international communication networks intersect. The subsistence of these cities has always depended not only on controlling the physical space where these networks are located, but also on their continuous adaptation and transformation in relation to new circumstances.[12]

Until the 19th century, the technology for loading and unloading ships remained the same as that used since the beginning of modern times,

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10   Henk Driessen and Mireia Bofill Abelló, "La puerta trasera de Europa. Notas etnograficas sobre la frontera húmeda entre españa y marruecos," *Historia y Fuente Oral*, no. 12 (1994).

11   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

12   Braudel, *Mediterranean.*

which allowed the persistence of the port city model. As Dirk Schubert points out,[13] it was not about "cities with ports," but rather a particular model of symbiosis between the sea, the port, and the urban settlement.

However, with the advent of the 20th century, the rapid growth of commerce and industry required significant expansion of these port cities. Towards the end of the 19th and into the 20th century, larger ports underwent reconstruction, introducing linear docks to accommodate steamships, warehouses, and railway terminals. The pressures of commercial and industrial growth drove these ports to extend beyond the confines of densely populated urban areas, where space was limited and tightly hemmed in by the sea and mountainous terrain. The period from 1960 to the 1980s marked an additional phase of separation between the port and the city due to emerging technologies such as containerization and roll-on/roll-off facilities. These innovations required more space for storage and, at the same time, less labour, intensified the separation between port and city.[14]

Since 1970, there has been a process of urban renewal in the areas of the old ports in the largest port cities of the Mediterranean. Cases like Valencia, Barcelona, or Marseille are successful examples of overcoming the post-industrial crisis and reactivating relations between port and city, demonstrating great capacity for adaptation and resilience.[15] The challenge lies in achieving a delicate equilibrium between urban and economic development, often referred to as regeneration, and the safeguarding and enhancement of the distinctive local characteristics. This process has also paved the way for new avenues of development in contemporary cities, as exemplified by the work of De Rosa and Di Palma.[16]

Despite the role that port cities, particularly Mediterranean ones, have played in the emergence of the global economic system,[17] it is notable that they have received relatively scant attention from the fields of humanities and social sciences, as highlighted by.[18] This oversight is somewhat surprising, given that these port cities have served as essential hubs in networks vital for connecting diverse regions for over two millennia.

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13   Dirk Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities: Causes and Trends between Divergence and Convergence," in *Port Cities as Areas of Transition: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Waltraud Kokot, Mijal Gandelsman-Trier, Kathrin Wildner and Astrid Wonneberger (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2015).

14   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

15   De Rosa and Di Palma, "Historic Urban Landscape".

16   De Rosa and Di Palma, "Historic Urban Landscape".

17   Bentley, Bridenthal and Wigen. *Seascapes*.

18   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

Conditions of vitality

What specific attributes distinguish these cities as exemplary instances of urban resilience? By delving into the works of Fernand Braudel,[19] Dirk Schubert,[20] and Henk Driessen,[21] [22] we aim to formulate a hypothesis based on three essential attributes, which we have termed "conditions of vitality." These attributes appear to have played a pivotal role in shaping the extended historical existence and ongoing adaptability of these coastal urban settlements.

Transience. According to Fernand Braudel,[23] the first condition of Mediterranean port cities is their structural mobility, their contact with a network of interdependencies between the coast and the interior, in which the port plays a pivotal role.

Braudel emphasizes that if there is any unity in the Mediterranean, it is a unity defined by human activities and the connections formed among people. The Mediterranean should then be seen as a complex network, where the most vital movements occur by sea but complemented by important land routes extending into the continent. It's precisely at the juncture of these two routes that port cities emerge, functioning as key nodes along these channels. Matvejevic even proposes a unique bond among port cities, conceivably more potent than their ties to their respective countries.[24]

These channels facilitate the flow of diverse elements such as trends, conflicts, technologies, epidemics, and trade goods through these cities, factors that not only influenced social and cultural dynamics but also contribute to the configuration of urban landscapes.[25] As Braudel observes, these cities have historically served as conduits for a wide range of commodities, individuals, and information, forming what François Ascher[26] terms the BIP mobility system—mobility of goods, information, and people—operating on regional, national, and international scales.

Plurality. Port cities have been the culmination of economic, social, and cultural innovations, due in part to their plurality.[27] They are places of contrasts, where poverty and wealth, tradition and modernity, the foreign and the familiar, the local and the exotic meet. Schubert characterizes these urban centres as meeting grounds for interactions with foreign cultures, encompassing arrivals, departures, and residents. Those who choose to

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19   Braudel, *Mediterranean*.

20   Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities".

21   Driessen and Abelló, "La puerta trasera de Europa".

22   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

23   Braudel, *Mediterranean*.

24   Predrag Matvejevic, *Mediterranean: A cultural landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

25   Braudel, *Mediterranean*.

26   François Ascher, *Les nouveaux principes de l'urbanisme* (Avignon: Editions de l'Aube, 2001).

27   Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities".

settle often retain their distinct identities, finding their place in a multifaceted social framework where opposites coexist.

A clear case is that of ethnic plurality, visible in the enclaves of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians, who for many generations have lived in these cities, acting as intermediaries in long-distance trade, "which opened opportunities for the development of ethnic economies".[28] In many Mediterranean ports, these ethnical communities introduced their unique lifestyles, culinary traditions, work practices, and housing arrangements, while they were often perceived as exotic in the surrounding inland regions.

The port districts were often stigmatized as unsafe and morally questionable, but simultaneously they provided newcomers with a crucible for informal adaptation processes and the development of ethnic economies, as referred by Schubert.[29] Multilingualism was a common feature among the residents of these cities, with many individuals fluently speaking in at least three languages, a clear indication of the extensive cultural connections these cities fostered.

Porosity. The idea of porosity[30] refers to the capacity of these cities to absorb certain external influences and make them their own, without losing their initial form. Porous materials absorb external elements they encounter, retaining some while rejecting others, all the while maintaining their original form. Similar processes occur within urban settlements, particularly in these port cities. Chambers[31] emphasizes this quality in the history of Naples in a chapter named A Porous Modernity. As she notes, in Piazza Bellini, you can see both the ancient Greek walls and the prevalence of Baroque architecture, along with the aging and irregular paving of historic streets and alleys, "with its violent mixture of antiquated street customs and global design capitalism".[32]

Another illustration of this porosity is provided by Malte Fuhrmann,[33] who discusses the ability of cities from the former Ottoman Empire, such as Thessaloniki and Izmir, to quickly adapt and embrace predominantly Western references after the empire's collapse. These cities, where the primary *raison d'être* was their role as commercial intermediaries for an extended period, began to incorporate aesthetic concerns, such as urban landscapes with elements of symmetry and regularity. Such shifts were accompanied by changes in lifestyle, such as the recreational use of the city, seaside promenades, and cultural influences such as fashion, clothing, opera, theatre, and the introduction of beer as a consuming habit.

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28   Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities," 27.

29   Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities"

30   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

31   Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted* (London: Duke University Press, 2008).

32   Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 73.

33   Malte Fuhrmann, *Port Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean: Urban Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

The ship as a city

Lorenzo Costa, The Argonauts (detail), 1488. Source: http://arte.cini.it/Opere/236087

Kären Wigen[34] discusses how in maritime ethnographic and archaeological studies, the ship has always had great relevance, understood as a complex cultural artifact, representing specific maritime traditions and regional variations. In Lorenzo Costa's painting, *The Argonauts* (Fig.3), we can see the meticulous representation of the ship, adorned with opulent golden embellishments mirroring the attire of the crew. This portrayal serves as an expression of a culture deeply rooted in a specific space and time.

Conversely, *Pequod,* the unique ship of *Moby Dick*,[35] is a paradigmatic example of the composite nature of vessels, and how they transform and assimilate elements as needed. In Melville's description,[36] *Pequod* had three masts "made somewhere on the coast of Japan, where the originals were lost in a gale, "and coated with materials and devices so peculiar that they could only be compared to the carved buckler of Thorkill-hake".

In the archaic Mediterranean, between the 8th and 6th centuries BC, where mobility was the norm, the ship was already a central element of the Greeks' mental images, an object of fascination and a means of contact with the unknown.[37] In a famous allegory—*The Ship of State*—commented on by the philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, the ship is identified

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34   Bentley, Bridenthal and Wigen. *Seascapes.*

35   Herman Melville, *Moby Dick or The Whale* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002 [First edition: 1851]).

36   Melville, *Moby Dick*, 68.

37   Gras, *Mediterráneo Arcaico.*

with the city (polis). Its flanks and hull are compared to the walls, which "resist storms in the same way as the city, threatened by tyranny, suffers social and political crises." The pilot, who controls the ship "as the governor controls the city, and the sailor, in the face of the gale, establishes himself as the combatant who defends his city".[38]

Similarly, Michel Foucault[39] identifies the ship as an example of heterotopia, a space with its own socio-cultural characteristics, a world within the world, and a reflection of society and its intrinsic logic. The notion of the ship as a self-contained universe is pushed to its limits in *Livro Grande de Tebas, Navio e Mariana,*[40] when the ship's captain suggests to the protagonist an expedition beyond the ship's "known zone."

Delving into the inner depths of the vessel, the explorers descend via elevators and staircases, crossing through endless labyrinthine tunnels. In these uncharted regions, they come across entire cities, districts inhabited by people from the East who entered but could never depart, where feral dogs roam. Among the eerie discoveries are the remnants of a past explorer, an expansive lake without visible shores, and curious beaches of metal shavings and debris. In the distance, they spot the stranded hull of a boat, still equipped with its mast and tattered rigging. This expedition into the ship's interior becomes an integral part of the protagonist's own odyssey, marked by its enigmatic, fantastical, and perilous nature.

The resources of fiction

However, the way of seeing the sea seems to be associated with the nature of the observer. As Wigen[41] points out, while social scientists tend to view the sea as an area of conflict, focusing on issues such as commercial privileges and resource rights, humanists prefer to explore the indescribable contours of the oceanic imaginary, map, and metaphor, from the perspectives of cinema and literature. This duality between science and art is also highlighted by Gras, who explains how, since the archaic period, observers have perceived the Mediterranean, juxtaposing "the way of seeing of philosophers and geographers to that of poets".[42]

The interaction between description and invention, reality and fiction, has been abundant and varied, starting with Homer's *Odyssey.*[43] The question of the truthfulness of travel accounts is often debated, as seen in the case of Gemelli Careri (1651–1725) and his work *Giro del Mondo*, written after an extensive global voyage with a specific focus on Latin America. For a

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38   Gras, *Mediterráneo Arcaico,* 33.

39   Michel Foucault "Des espaces autres," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (1984).

40   Mário de Carvalho, *O Livro Grande de Tebas, Navio e Mariana (*Porto: Porto Editora, 2017 [First edition: 1982]).

41   Bentley, Bridenthal and Wigen. *Seascapes*.

42   Gras, *Mediterráneo Arcaico,* 19.

43   Gras, *Mediterráneo Arcaico*.

long time, its authenticity was challenged, and the materials presented, including maps of several indigenous communities South America, were considered counterfeit.

Interestingly, eighteen years later, in the famous *Gulliver's Travels*,[44] a narrative about the remarkable journeys of a mariner who ends up in Lisbon aboard a Portuguese vessel, the author frequently blurs the lines between these two dimensions. This work combines real locations with imaginary geographies while providing detailed technical information regarding navigation. The book begins with a letter from the character Lemuel Gulliver to a cousin, expressing his concerns about the alterations made to his narrative, where essential sections were removed, casting doubt on the veracity of his testimony. Gulliver asserts his sincere intention to remain true to the facts, unlike many travel accounts of his era that were considered unreliable.

In another case, *Moby Dick*,[45] while clearly a novel, is also an expression of prolonged experience of the sea and navigation, resulting from the numerous voyages made by Herman Melville as a cabin boy in the merchant navy.[46] Moreover, there is an almost scientific component in the book's portrayal of whaling, accurately describing life on board, its dynamics and rituals, and the taxonomy of different types of whales.

In the 20th century, authors such as Jorge Luis Borges or Italo Calvino also explored this duality, resorting to fiction to address central themes of architecture, urbanism, ways of living, and the imaginary around the distant and the unknown. The same can be seen in Mário de Carvalho's *O Livro Grande de Tebas, Navio e Mariana*,[47] a contemporary odyssey around the Mediterranean, in which the protagonist sails on ships as intriguing as his strange passages through Tunisia, Syria, or Turkey. The desolation of the real, which is often hostile and incomprehensible, intersects with the marvellous and the dreamlike, which is a fundamental part of the Mediterranean imaginary.[48]

Description and invention

According to Braudel,[49] understanding the port cities of the Mediterranean implies considering their relationship with the network of maritime routes, their origin and engine of development. In fact, Schubert[50] underlines the particularities of each of these cities, largely determined by the type

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44   Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Norwalk: Easton Press, 2011 [First edition: 1726]).

45   Melville, *Moby Dick*.

46   Melville, *Moby Dick*.

47   de Carvalho, *O Livro Grande de Tebas, Navio e Mariana*.

48   Matvejevic, *Mediterranean: A cultural landscape*.

49   Braudel, *Mediterranean*.

50   Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities".

of port, its contact with the sea, and the relationship between port and urban space. For this purpose, fiction can be a valuable complementary resource, whether as an introduction to the themes and experience of navigation, the relationship between the sea and the port, or contact with the diversity of "Mediterranean voices".[51]

To further our research, we've analysed three fictional precedents. These precedents involve different maritime routes associated with specific types of journeys: exploratory (1), formative (2), and recreational (3). Our selection was guided by three specific criteria. First, irrespective of their starting and ending points, all three journeys are centred on the Mediterranean region, encompassing both the sea itself and the urban and natural environments along its shores. Second, each of these journeys predominantly employs ships as the primary mode of transportation, with different types of vessels used in each case. This highlights the central role played by ships, especially the experiences of life on board, where a substantial portion of the journey takes place. Lastly, in all three cases, there is a latent interplay between reality and fiction, contributing to the reimagining and reconstruction of the navigation experience.

1. CITY OF TROY
2. CITY OF ISMARUS
3. LOTUS-EATERS ISLAND
4. POLYPHEMUS CAVE
5. AEOLIAN ISLAND
6. CITY OF LAMOS
7. ISLAND OF CIRCE
8. ISLAND OF SIRENS
9. CHARYBDIS AND SCYLLA
10. ISLAND OF CALYPSO
11. SCHERIA ISLAND
12. ITHACA ISLAND

FIG. 4   In the footsteps of Ulysses, itinerary and photographs 1912. Source: Figure by the author.

In the Footsteps of Ulysses. In 1912, the geographer and translator Victor Bérard embarked on a long and daring journey around the Mediterranean with photographer Fred Boissonnas, with the goal of proving his theory about the descriptive component of Homer's writings. According to Bérard, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not merely literary works, but rather

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51   Braudel, *Mediterranean*.

a detailed record of the Mediterranean in Phoenician times.[52] Using various types of vessels, including skimmers, steamers, and small fishing boats, they followed in the footsteps of Ulysses from Troy to Ithaca, passing through Turkey, Tunisia, Italy, Gibraltar, and Greece. This is an illustration of the attribute of transience, one of the proposed conditions of vitality, and how they collectively form a network of interconnected points through the sea, serving as a relational platform. We also see how the boat, in its various types, scales, and technologies, plays a crucial role in the context of the Mediterranean, simultaneously serving as a means of transportation, a working tool, and a space for living. Although his hypothesis was not confirmed, the enterprise of Bérard and Boissonnas was not in vain. The photographs and written records they produced during their trip proved to be unique documents about life in the Mediterranean on the eve of the First World War.[53] The discovery of this unpublished material led to the creation of the research project *The Odyssey, from Myth to Photography* by the *Département de Géographie et Environnement de l'Université de Genève*, with the aim of reconsidering the artistic, scientific, and political value of this significant photographic project and the possibilities of interconnection between geography and fiction.
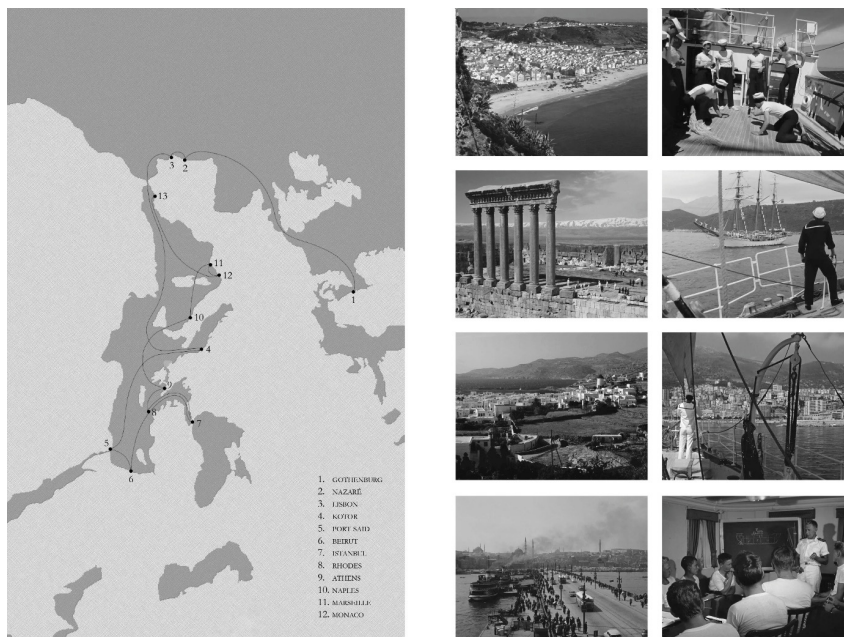

FIG. 5   Flying Clipper, itinerary and frames 1962. Source: Figure by the author.

Flying Clipper. *Mediterranean Holiday* or *Flying Clipper* is a fictional documentary that was presented at the 3rd Moscow International Film Festival in 1963. The film was made by Austrian directors Hermann Leitner and Rudolf Nussgruber, and it follows the journey of a Swedish merchant

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52   Sohier Estelle, "Ré-imaginer la Méditerranée avec l'Odyssée, la carte et la photographie. Victor Bérard, un géographe sur les traces d'Ulysse," *Annales de géographie* 3, no. 709-710 (2016).

53   Estelle, "Ré-imaginer la Méditerranée avec l'Odyssée"

marine ship, a schooner with three masts, its captain, and its crew of twenty young cadets to the Mediterranean. The trip served as both an educational and recreational experience, as a reward for the cadets who spent the year sailing in the North Sea. Although the film's somewhat touristic nature is evident, with a series of "postcards" from each country, and unnecessary references to the military importance of the United States as a guarantor of order, such as when one of the cadets is taken to an American aircraft carrier due to appendicitis, it provides a rare perspective on the relationship of each of the cities visited with the sea, the layout of the ports, life on board, and the dynamics of navigation in the Mediterranean. Some records of local ways of life are also valuable documents, such as the first stop they make in Nazaré, where they replenish fresh water and connect with fishermen on the Portuguese coast. As they journey through cities, we notice a somewhat artificial attempt to highlight the distinctive features of each community. This is evident through various means, including religious rites as the Catholic procession in Spain, civic celebrations featuring traditional songs and dances in Sicily, military parades witnessed on the island of Rhodes, and even picturesque events like camel fights in Turkey. At the same time, signs of significant diversity—or plurality—are often observed, such as the contrast between the dynamics of the port area of Port Said and the profound rural life experienced further inland.

FIG. 6   A talking picture, itinerary and frames 2003. Source: Figure by the author.

A Talking Picture. A mother travels with her daughter on a Mediterranean cruise to meet her husband who is waiting for them in Mumbai. This is the starting point of the famous film by Manoel de Oliveira, released in 2003. A history teacher, the mother takes advantage of the trip to show

her daughter the places "sanctified or mythologized"[54] in the history of the West, passing by the *Castel dell'Ovo*, the ruins of Pompeii, the Acropolis, Hagia Sophia or the Sphinx. In the stories that the mother tells her daughter, the idea of multicultural contact and assimilation—or porosity—of these cities is always present. This includes the encounters of the Greeks with Marseille and Naples, the complex layers of Christian and later Muslim occupation in Turkey, and France's presence in Egypt during the Napoleonic wars. This happens in the first part of the film, in which the action takes place almost entirely on land, in the port cities and their surroundings. However, except for a brief stop in Aden, the second part is completely focused on what happens on the ship itself. This change happens after crossing the Suez Canal, as highlighted by João Bénard da Costa: "only when passing the Mediterranean we can see the inside of the ship; [...] it is no longer a means of travel, but the purpose of the journey itself".[55] The ship becomes the stage for the action, no longer just for the mother and daughter, but also for the characters who embark and disembark at various ports, including renowned stars like Catherine Deneuve, Stefania Sandrelli, and Irene Papas. They engage in casual conversations at the captain's table, where languages such as Italian, French, Greek, and English coexist without blending. From this moment onwards, everything unfolds within the ship and its different compartments. As this is a fiction film, the boundary between description and invention is not always clear. Examples of this are certain mundane situations and characters, such as the fish seller in Marseille, the Orthodox priest in Athens, or the Portuguese actor Luís Miguel Cintra in Cairo, playing himself.

Conclusion

This article sought to establish a broad perspective on the port cities of the Mediterranean, considering both the complexity of their context and history, as well as the particularities of their model. Such an exploration is relevant because, as highlighted by De Rosa and Di Palma,[56] port cities provide ideal case studies for investigating urban resilience, the delicate equilibrium between local identity and global influences. This balance involves preserving their distinctive characteristics and core values while continuously adapting to evolving economic, cultural, and technological demands. Moreover, these port cities serve as valuable insights into the ongoing processes of urban transformation, shedding light on new pathways for the development of contemporary urban areas.

To achieve this, an exploratory and multidisciplinary approach was followed, combining insights from the humanities and social sciences, which, until now, had not been extensively explored in the case of Mediterranean

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54   Bénard da Costa, *Manoel de Oliveira (*Lisbon: Cinemateca Portuguesa, 1981).

55   da Costa, *Manoel de Oliveira,* 7.

56   De Rosa and Di Palma, "Historic Urban Landscape".

port cities.[57] The heuristic nature of this approach, through the intersection of different methods and worldviews, is valuable for the construction of a nuanced yet general and introductory perspective on these urban settlements.

The intersection of these two disciplinary families led to the formulation of a hypothesis, an interpretation of some attributes for the urban resilience of these port cities, which we named as "conditions of vitality." These attributes, encompassing transience, plurality, and porosity, have been drawn from the works of prominent scholars such as Fernand Braudel,[58] Dirk Schubert,[59] and Henk Driessen,[60][61] respectively. This synthesis represents an initial step towards future research, as it aims to consolidate the diverse perspectives offered by various disciplines across different time periods.

Additionally, we sought to link this literature review with fiction and its resources as a complementary research method. As observed, this aspect has consistently played a central role in the history and imagination of the Mediterranean, where the sea, navigation, and encounters with the unknown have been pivotal. In our analysis of the three selected cases, the potential of connecting description and invention as a privileged means of gaining experiential insights becomes apparent. In this context, we examine the experience of traveling through the Mediterranean, exploring the various cities in the region, their ways of life, the connections between urban centres and the sea, and the dynamics of navigation itself. This appears to be a crucial area for further exploration within the realms of architecture and urbanism. By doing so, we can blend the precision and rigor of analytical processes and their communication with a dimension rooted in sensitivity and intuition.

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57   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

58   Braudel, *Mediterranean*.

59   Schubert, "Transformation Processes on Waterfronts in Seaport Cities".

60   Driessen and Abelló, "La puerta trasera de Europa".

61   Driessen, "Mediterranean port cities".

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