**1. Book Proposal:**

**“People and goods on the move.” Merchants, Networks and Communication Routes in the Medieval and early Modern Mediterranean.**

Over the past decade the interest in a Mediterranean wide history regained the attention of many historians whether interested in commerce, politics or social aspects. This proposed volume reflects such an interest and historians who are looking beyond national and territorial boundaries trying to establish the networks of communications in its various aspects. The appearance of two compelling volumes, *The origins of European Commerce* by Michael McCormick and *The Corrupting Sea* by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, contributed to reassess the historiographical debate on the nature of Mediterranean communications, cultural interaction and political and economical relationship across different historical periods.[[1]](#footnote-1) In particular, as the latter stressed the importance of connectivity in a history in the Mediterranean (with an ecological penchant), the former focused on the role of commerce and communications at the origins of the Mediterranean world as vehicle for the creation of a European economy. Although, McCormick deals with the period 300-900 A.D., the methodological importance of his analytical approach moves beyond the late antique and early medieval period. Indeed, we are not only confronted with a systematic and exhaustive collection of literary and documentary sources paired with indirect evidence of communication and, more important, tested by the material evidence (from coins to seals, from shipwrecks to ceramics).

More importantly, however, McCormick highlights the fact that “rather demanding that the sources give us what we want, we take what they can give to us, [and] they give us communications.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In order to trace these communications McCormick insisted upon two sets of movements: the movement of individuals and of objects. “If independent sets of evidence continuously uncover the same patterns, chances are strong that those patterns stern from reality, and are not artifacts of the circumstances which produced and preserved that set of evidence.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Upon presenting the reader with a wide array of objects that travelled (from relics to coins) and people on the move (from ambassadors to pilgrims), McCormick provided a richer matrix for patterns of Mediterranean communications not always commercial in nature.

 The present volume aims at offering a less detailed but chronologically broader survey of the agents of the above mentioned matrix of communications across the Mediterranean basin from the early Medieval to the Modern era. Rather than indulging upon the supposed and catastrophic mid-seventh century caesura (as advocated by Pirenne), or moving from the second trade cycle (as described by Wickham) this collection of articles stresses the continuities in the dynamic connectivity of the Mediterranean. By observing the faces of those who continuously build these networks and goods which travel across, the reader will enact Penelope and her loom where endless threads and knots were made and destroyed in a fortnight. In a similar vein (loosely in tune with a Braudelian *longue durée*), the volume offers an interdisciplinary and encompassing digest over the manifold actors of this incessant weaving and undoing of communications across different periods of Mediterranean history.

The first essay by Thomas McMaster analyses the often invisible and faceless (in the written sources) groups of forced laborers/travellers, the slaves. Dispelling the idea that the cultural unity of the Mediterranean was broken by the ruinous Muslim incursions, this paper stresses a re-orientation of shipping routes and trade patterns, which predated the appearance of Islam in the Mediterranean coasts. In tune with this idea of functional rearrangement of commercial relationships between the western and eastern half of the Mediterranean, Aysu Dincer’s paper focuses on the trade and keeping of precious stones offering a glimpse of the role a Mediterranean island (Cyprus) played in the late Middle ages and the spread of these precious commodities to Europe. She is tracing these items in notarial accounts, chronicles, travellers’ accounts and merchants’ letters. The next article focuses on another precious commodity, namely silk. Celine Dauverd explores the importance of silk in the Genoese land and sea-empire during the transition from Medieval to Early Modern period. Again like Dincer’s article she looks into the commercial interactions, which establish the relationship of the Mediterranean to continental Europe.

The second part of the book then moves to the second dimension of communication and cultural traffic, which emanates from personal exchanges. Maria Rosaria Salerno and Stephen Sanders’s contributions, offer excellent examples of inter-Mediterranean communications and relations generated through the role of elites. On the one hand we are presented with a complex coexistence of political and cultural implications of the long standing interest in and influence of the Maghrebi during the thirteenth and fourteenth century on the rulers of the Neapolitan Kingdom. Moving to the northern part of the peninsula on the other hand, the second essay dwells on the importance of procuratorial appointments for the reconstruction of ‘communication’ in Venice during the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Period.: The suitable characteristics and advantages of the *procurae* , indeed, make them an ideal tool to investigate the extent of Venetian commercial and political network of communications. Next, Alessandro Buono’ article reminds us that the above mentioned network was also the results of the incessant travels of crucial group of border–crossers, the *pedotti*: a real maritime minority of professional ferries between Istria and the Serenissima who in the sixteenth century not only transported ships and goods but also contributed to forge a cultural link between the two sides of the Adriatic.

Finally, and in tune with the coda of the volume, Federico Rigamonti encourages the reader to look beyond the Mediterranean in a diachronic and comparative perspective. He is reflecting on the different modes, natures and trajectories of traveling and communications while at the same time analyzing the gravitational attraction exerted by the Mediterranean over Dutch traders -- with particular emphasis on their presence in Sicilian ports.

By looking at the plurality of lives and influences of different Mediterranean commodities and intellectuals, the readers are ushered into a reflection on the history of the transmission of ideas and skills from the Byzantine to the Ottoman era. Basically, journeys, and especially sea journeys with a variety of goods and people together in an inescapable small space for several weeks/months, were “the only tangible element in the convergence and divergence of worldviews where the arteries of trade routes became elusive carriers of songs, philosophies and technical know-how.” In fact, whether the Mediterranean facilitates cultural and ethnic interplay, or whether we view it as a barrier that separates civilizations and traditions, a close study of Mediterranean on the sea exchanges can be revealing. The history of transportation and commercial activities tell stories of men and cultures; the nature of individuals and societies; problems inherent in shipping and routes, as well as currencies and commodities. Looking at commercial activity and travelling is the method of mapping, reading and comprehending the Mediterranean world, and the dialogue of societies beyond its immediate? shores. It reveals a dialogue morphing into an “intangible cargo” transported across shipping routes often escaping the investigation of historians.

**2. Readership of the Book and the Volume as set within the tradition of scholarship**

This selection of essays is the result of the third edition of the MedWorlds: Conference on Mediterranean Worlds Conference (University of Salerno 2011); the conference has been held for the last seven years, and has manifested itself in remarkable papers on literature, art, philosophies, religions, archaeological readings, political theories and economic practices, of the region. In particular, this volumes focuses on the politics and economics of trade across the Mediterranean in the passage from the late Medieval period to the modern era; a narrative centered upon the tangible and intangible aspects of commercial relationship across political, religious and cultural Mediterranean Frontiers; a narrative piercing through the Commercial revolution of the eleventh century when –as Cipolla states- *mercatores* dictated the tempo of a social and cultural revolution.

It is indeed clear in our mind that apart from the two above mentioned seminal works, this volume tries to follow the course of scholarly history set by those economic historians like Henry Pirenne, Carlo Cipolla, Roberto Sabatino Lopez, Emanuel Ashtor and more recently Richard Hodges, Angeliki Laiou, Karl Personn, David Jacoby and Chris Wickham (to quote just a few); rather than proposing a generalizing, macro-historical narrative of the trading institutions or merchant activities inhabiting the coasts of the *Mare di Mezzo*, the volume explores a number of key studies (micro-histories) spanning across almost ten centuries of Mediterranean history.

It includes papers on different aspects of the commercial dynamics: from historical to archaeological, from political to sociological. This being so this interdisciplinary book also aims at illustrating the important cultural role trade played within different Mediterranean societies stressing the continuity from the seventh to the seventeenth century showed by people (traders and other actors) and spaces (trade routes) to influence social and cultural practices for they encourage societies to meet and intermingle. Indeed, this book will be of special interest to readers who are engrossed in the economic history of Mediterranean in general but also to special interest readers, i.e. academics and students, more focused on single geographic areas as well as specific themes and topics or periods.

The Mediterranean, in various literatures, is perceived as infinite: a sphere of unseen possibilities. Both the sea and its shores are intractably connected and in constant flux. Border, boundary, or bridge, the mass of water has for millennia been divisive or connective for those who inhabit its shores. Merchants and goods are engrained in this connectivity as their practices of goods exchange, the liquid or land paths they walked and the spaces they inhabited (like the port cities on particular shores) shared and morphed into a common hybrid and cosmopolitan, socio-economic and political structures. After all aren’t traders the ideal frequenters of Abulafia’s Mediterranean? A sea seen as kind of traversable void that has been, for millennia, a space around which humans have been able to travel, for bad or for good, to get to somewhere else, or simply to take things there and bring other things back.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**3. Table of Content**

1. *Introduction* (O. Çaykent and L. Zavagno)
2. *Slavery and the Seventh Century Caesura* (T.J. MacMaster, University of Edinburgh)
3. *Pearls of Wisdom, Gems of Legend: Material Culture and Trade in Precious Stones in Late Medieval Cyprus* (Aysu Dincer, University of Warwick)
4. *A Kingdom of Silk: The Genoese as Artisans, Merchants, Bankers, 1450-1650* (Cèline Dauverd, University of Colorado, Boulder)
5. *Relations, politics and economic choices in the Mediterranean:
The Kingdom of Naples and Tunisia between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries* (Mariarosaria Salerno, University of Calabria)
6. *Procuratorial Networks: Reconstructing Communication in the Early Modern Adriatic* (Stephen Sander, University of Zurich)
7. *The construction of a professional minority. ‘Istrian pilots’ in early modern Venice (15th-18th centuries)* (Alessandro Buono, University of Milan)
8. *Dutch Navigation in Sicily* (first half of the Seventeenth Century) (Federico Rigamonti, University of Palermo)

**Number of words**: 55000 words ca.

**Maps and Illustration**: 30 ca. (b/w)

1. M.Mc.Cormick, *Origins of European Economy. Communications and Commerce AD. 300-900* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001); [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. McCormick, *Origins* cit., p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. N.Lazard, “Review of David Abulafia’s the Great Sea,” in *The Guardian* 1.05.2012

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/01/great-sea-david-abulafia-review> retrieved 25.3.2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)