Travel as Knowledge and Reflection in Mediterranean Memories

"Walker, your footprints
are the road and nothing else;
walker, there is no path,
the path is made by walking.
When you walk, you make a path.
And when you look back
you see the path that will never
be stepped on again.
Walker there is no path
but wakes in the sea."

Antonio Machado (Seville, 1875 - Colliure, 1939)

Is there always a return journey? We believe that this is mostly so because we know the stories left to us by travellers who, like Ulysses after his long, eventful and heroic journey, returned to Ithaca or to the places from where they set out. However, not all travellers return or want to return to the point of origin. There are also those who travel through introspection, creating a travelling thought that transforms us, whether through philosophy, literature or poetry. Homer's Ulysses defeats the gods who insist on hindering his return journey, while Nietzsche's Zarathustra, despised by men, will seek out new listeners along the way to tell of the death of the gods and the never-ending eternal return. The thought of no return also contains the hope of a present that can be different, as we will see in some of the stories by the young writers in the dossier of this issue, entitled "Travel and Mediterranean Memory".

We have chosen this theme to approach different memories through the element of travelling, a good way to explore that cosmopolitan, introspective and shared world that tells us much more than what is recognised by our knowledge governed by school guidelines. "Travel and Mediterranean Memory" is not a compilation of distinguished characters, but the result of the interest of the contributors to this issue in reflecting their own thoughts and those of figures, some better known than others, who have left a mark on Mediterranean memory. The Mediterranean is a space of multiple crossroads, constructed through the development of myths, characters and narratives.

This dossier comprises around twenty articles, whose authors show us the importance of memory in identity, while reminding us of the instability of life, maps or borders. We cannot recover memory without telling the story, frequently omitted, of those travellers and wanderers who, in some way, have imbued the rich Mediterranean culture. Neither must we forget our current time, a crucial moment for the planet, and the reflections of the authors serve as a warning to seafarers, such as those by the historian José Enrique Ruiz-Domènec, which begin this dossier.

Writing about history is an eternal return, because the historian's gaze is always subjective, according to the epistemological and particular interests of the historical moment. José Enrique Ruiz-Domènec points out that all civilisations have been created from a latent structure that impregnates them with reason. That should be the objective of all historical research, trying to reveal, in this way, the secret life of the feelings of a group of people, their effects on daily decisions, and the indivisible stories that forge common history. Hence, the historian notes, arises the so-called "Ulysses' dream", which took over Mediterranean culture to guide the specific life of the men of the Mediterranean Sea, and so that they would carry out a permanent reading of the classics as an antidote to oblivion and the basis of their illuminations. Following what Ruiz-Domènec warns us about, the dream is revealed as a legacy that the past offers to the future to guide their steps and not make the same mistakes, those conflicts whose echo still resounds due to the clumsy ways they were resolved.

From the other end of the Mediterranean, the artist and professor Selim Birsel also presents us with the memory of classical Greece through the figure of the poetess Sappho. The artist himself sets out on a journey to a small Greek town to look for homemade fig liquor. On his return, Birsel, with a glass of *suma* in one hand and the poems of Sappho translated into Turkish by Azra Erhat in the other, suggests how we can fantasise and dream about the Mediterranean from an armchair.

Azra Erhat, a writer, classical philologist and humanist, translated the Greek classics into Turkish between the 1950s and 1970s and, for the first time, introduced Turkish readers to the masterpieces of Antiquity. However, she was never able to visit Lesbos. In the proposal to continue the journey, Birsel begins a daydream by dialoguing with Erhat as if she were alive, in a conversation about Greek poetry and, specifically, Sappho. Placing themselves in the 6th and 7th centuries BC, they assert that Sappho was the first person we know who felt the need to express her own feelings and, realising this, took the first step towards revealing those human emotions openly. Birsel goes on to affirm that, as the poetess found an emotional universe and expressed her truth, she stands as a symbol of an individualism typical of the time and region where she lived, thus reflecting that period in an extremely effective manner, which has so greatly influenced poetry to this day.

If the Greek classics are a world reference, the Arabist Manuela Cortés revives for our memory the importance that the region of *Xarq al-Andalus* (to the east of al-Andalus) enjoyed in its day. This Levante region was shaped as one of the irradiating focuses of Hispano-Muslim culture (11th-13th centuries), focused on the courts of Denia, Játiva,

Valencia and Murcia, with its own identity, as shown by the surviving documentary sources of the time. The researcher cites a series of very important musical and literary artistic achievements, as well as contributions to musical theory. However, Cortés points out, after the conquest of James I, this area came under Christian rule, and many Muslim musicians and scholars had to emigrate to the south. Even so, the existing sources confirm the presence of a great musical and literary culture thanks, above all, to the patronage of the rulers. The list of wise men and scholars who shone at the time makes up part of the culture, as well as a heritage that is little known and yet no less relevant for that.

Breaking stereotypes about the Middle Ages is the subject of medievalist Roser Salicrú in her research, as she reminds us that, at this time, there was great mobility in the Mediterranean, often restricted to the two ends of the social scale: the most privileged and the most deprived, almost always men, although there were some princesses and abbesses among the travellers to the Holy Land. Of the numerous categories of travellers, Salicrú points out that the most likely to leave a record of a personal journey and experience were the pilgrims, so that, today, Christians, Jews and Muslims have their widely recognised travellers.

In the narrative sources that record personal memories of medieval travellers, the insistence on the difficulties of the journey is directly related to successfully overcoming those obstacles, because, otherwise, those memories would not have reached us. For this reason, the medievalist argues that, although it cannot always be said that the authors magnify the dangers and incidents, they do have a tendency to set down their own heroic deeds. As they are texts written to be read by third parties and as stories, overcoming dangers can be used as a literary element, to give more value to the experience itself.

Continuing with the narratives, we have important *rihlas* from the Muslim world. The word *rihla*, which means "journey in stages" in Arabic, designates both the journey and the subsequent chronicle. The genre appeared in the 12th century in the west of the Islamic world: the Maghreb and al-Andalus. The Algerian researcher Djamil Aïsani, like Roser Salicrú, provides extensive references on the various types of travellers, and describes the way in which specialists in economic history in the 1970s highlighted the importance of networks, especially commercial, in the structuring of the Islamic space. In his article, Aïsani focuses on the character of Hocine al-Wartilani, whose *rihla* contains many essential details about North Africa in the 18th century. It is a highly original travel account in several respects, written when al-Wartilani had already made his pilgrimage to Mecca, encouraged by leading a large caravan, as well as other "spiritual motivations." The researcher considers this work important because it contains information about life in society, gathered throughout the journey.

It is difficult to describe a culture without taking otherness into account, given that the various human groups have their own cultural specificities. In assessing a culture, we tend to develop an ethnocentric character, in accordance with the classic concept of centre-periphery in relation to the system or the dominant position. Within a civilisation several cultures can coexist, but there will always be guidelines that provide a "civilising"

cohesion. These may consist of parities of a religious, legal, political or economic nature. The Orient contains those othernesses that, in the colonial era, would be observed and judged according to the chosen moment and space. Thus, several authors offer us their observations on the issue.

In Spain, the nearby Orient has historically been Morocco, which is why the articles by Rosa Cerarols, Youssef Akmir and Fatema Mernissi are complementary, as they bring us visions and memories of this country from the different travellers who visited it. For the geographer Rosa Cerarols, the complex relationship between Spain and Islam is an exception in the usual imperial relations and is characterised by an ambivalence that, in the case of Tétouan, the capital of the Spanish Protectorate, takes on very rich nuances that illustrate various discourses about that Spanish domestic Orient. The author explains that Tétouan, a commercial and beautiful city that did not stop growing and transforming, had a diverse population and a notable Jewish and Spanish presence along with the Muslim majority. Fascinated and often weighed down with prejudices, travellers approached the charms and mysteries of the city, often to end up justifying civilising colonialism as the only possible solution for the Moroccan territory.

The Moroccan professor Youssef Akmir also tells us about this same period and country, focusing on the traditional cultural and religious elite of both the Berber areas and other more Arabised and urban areas. Akmir states that, during the occupation of Morocco, which began to be established at the end of the 19th century, the Spanish and French authorities showed great interest in the figure of the sharifs and the holy men, who, at that time, enjoyed great power and wide prestige among the Moroccan population. Thus, the colonial authorities contacted these figures to obtain their cooperation in the occupation processes and managed to overcome, in many cases, pockets of local resistance that could endanger the peace and internal equilibrium of Moroccan society.

A text by the writer Fatema Mernissi, published by the Marsam publishing house in Rabat in 2004, concerns a figure who also visited Morocco. It is a vision of the little-known period that Georges Orwell spent in Marrakech in 1938, which turned out to be a failure due to his inability to communicate with the Arabs, despite the appreciation he felt for them. Although he was a left-wing man who spent his life fighting against totalitarianism, this inability has been blamed on his racist background. However, Mernissi imagines that Orwell was most likely uninformed and isolated. Hence, he could not have known about the existence of supporters of Abdel Krim, leader of the secular and progressive movement that opposed local religious extremism, on the one hand, and the French and Spanish occupation, on the other. The writer, with a nod to us, argues that today, thanks to the new communication technologies that exist in Morocco, Orwell would have been able to contact those who were fighting for his same ideas, and his stay in Marrakech would have been very different.

Continuing with the memories about the Orient, the writer and traveller Patricia Almarcegui reminds us that women have not been the main object of research in this respect, nor even a secondary one. As they were not of general interest and invisible, women have

been practically deprived of existence; thus, although Almarcegui recognises that the discourses are never univocal, they are mostly androcentric and masculinised. The stories about the Orient contain stereotyped images where colonialism, orientalist ideology and negative attributes are mixed. Nevertheless, within the panorama of European writers and travellers who told of their experiences in the region, Almarcegui highlights three women, all white and belonging to the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie: Lady Montagu, Vita Sackville-West and Gertrude Bell. None of them were in Morocco, but they were in Turkey, Persia and Egypt, among other places in the Middle East. Their impressions are very valuable, despite the fact that none of them can completely free themselves from the masculine gaze and bias. However, according to Almarcegui, Gertrude Bell is the first in her account to name the Orient and turn it into a woman, probably because it has always represented the feminine, the expectant space available to be penetrated, possessed and dominated.

Three decades before Orwell's trip to Morocco, between 1912 and 1913, the Austrian writer Rainer Maria Rilke spent a few months in several Spanish cities, on a trip where many successive approaches to German culture with respect to the "Spanish soul" are focused. In this respect, the philosopher and writer Rafael Argullol points out that Rilke continues to draw from those same sources at the beginning of his "initiatory journey". In reality, this barely changed the author's preconceived vision of the country, as his notes show and despite the fact that, at times, his stay in Spain became unbearable for him. Argullol describes how, at that time, Rilke had forged an image of the Spanish landscape and culture based on the vision of German Romanticism, constructed in opposition to the rationalist and enlightened hegemony of French culture. Thus, the theatre of the Golden Age, the *Romancero* or *Don Quixote* leave a deep mark on the main German romantic authors, from Goethe to Schiller, within the framework of the broad tradition of the journey to the South, or to the East, which is no more than a spectacular expression of the desire for the Other, and to be the Other, that invaded modern German literature. For this reason, concludes the aesthetics professor, the travelling writer cannot be judged from the perspective of the tourist, since the latter knows, in the best of cases, why he goes to a place, while the travelling writer, even without leaving home, goes there because he knows. With the travelling writer, the mythical dimension prevails over the real, even though the physical experiences of the journey can modify essential elements of how it is perceived. The prevalence of myth is what, to a great extent, stimulates the play of correspondences between the desires generated by sensitivity and the spaces conceived by the imagination.

Undoubtedly, looking at the Other and approaching the Other have a long tradition in the Mediterranean. First, the Greco-Latin historians and geographers, later, the Arab travellers and, finally, the European romantic writers and travellers, left their fantastic, realistic or moral observations about the lands that surround the Mediterranean Sea long before the weight of "Mediterraneanism" fell almost exclusively on the shoulders of academic anthropology. Since the start of the discipline, at the end of the 19th century,

the myths and descriptions of the Mediterranean have been – and still are today – a source of reflection and comparison, to the point of becoming a classic arena in anthropological and humanistic studies. In this respect, the anthropologist Maria-Àngels Roque sets out the perspective of the discipline on the Mediterranean until the 1980s and, in particular, the conceptions and debates of the Anglo-Saxon anthropologists who, after the Second World War, with few resources to establish themselves in transoceanic areas, looked for the nearby exotic in European Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain or Greece.

If there is any memory accepted and integrated into daily practices, it is that of gastronomic products, many of them travellers through the centuries. Sylvia Oussedik, writer and expert on the different cuisines of the Mediterranean, tells us how a series of traditional cuisines coexist that, in their diversity, have common traits and philosophy, the result of exchanges and the historical cohesion of the region. Through historical events, such as the arrival of new products from Asia (aubergine) or America (tomato, potato, pepper or courgette), we can trace the slow variations and culinary changes produced over the centuries, always guided by frugality, conviviality and a set of common and very old techniques such as stuffing, the use of spices, light snacks or crushed and ground seasonings. Thus, Mediterranean cuisine, in all its diversity, constitutes a source of culture, traditions and socialisation, a legacy full of secrets, flavours and aromas that we must remember and preserve.

In recent decades, many intellectuals have worked and created around the essential question of the reencounter between the Arab world and the West and, here, the work of Mona Hatoum, a Lebanese artist of Palestinian origin and exiled in London, should be highlighted. Using the example of Beirut, a city with a multi-faith identity undergoing permanent reconstruction, José Miguel G. Cortés, a great connoisseur of contemporary Mediterranean artistic creation, wonders about the construction of the collective identity of this region, a place where, today, identities are constantly questioned and problematised. The researcher says that, in her works, Hatoum reflects on the precarious balance in which the Middle East finds itself and, from there, extrapolates the situation to the entire planet. Thus, the artist defends the importance of memory in identity, while she reminds us of the instability of life, maps or borders. The world is, therefore, a place ordered only in appearance, which at any time can move, unbalance or shift.

Rachid Koraïchi also reflects on memory, this time focusing on the creative act, in a conversation with the Arabist Nuria Medina that took place on the occasion of the artist's exhibition "This long journey into your gaze". Rachid Koraïchi is known for his contemporary art, which includes calligraphy as a graphic element. In relation to his work, he responds: "When I am asked how to situate my artistic creations, I respond that this should be based on their signs, lines and brushstrokes. My culture is that of writing, a millenary art. In North Africa, for example, the use of tattoos is an age-old tradition. You can determine what tribe each person comes from by their tattoos. The problem is that cultural colonization does away with everything by producing homogenization. Colonization and globalization have standardized everything."

Koraïchi values, to a great extent, the importance of the texts to maintain memory. Through his research, he has been able to trace the different branches of his family, who set off from Mecca in the 7th century. In the interview he states: "I see cultural creation as a phenomenon that goes far beyond each artist's ego. I exist as I am, because many other cultural expressions also have parallel existences in the very same era: painting, poetry, music, and so on. At the same time, when I construct something, I do not do so by destroying what my ancestors created." Rachid Koraïchi is a Sufi humanist who, in his artistic expression, introduces the thoughts of the masters Ibn Arabi, Rumi or al-Attar. In his work he uses mirrors, and he answers Nuria Medina's question with these words: "The Sufi master Rumi says that the truth is a mirror that came from the heavens and crashed onto Earth, shattering into pieces; each of us takes a piece of the mirror, and then we say we hold the truth, though in actuality we are each just holding a piece of that truth."

Current Accounts of Youths between Mobility and Migration Today

This issue of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* mostly comprises texts by specialists who, as we have explained, offer us their view on Mediterranean history and culture and, particularly, on travellers on that sea. However, I believe, in this dossier on travel and memory, it is appropriate to expand the experiences and immediate memory to give a voice to youths: anonymous people who tell us in the first person about their travelling experiences, feelings, hardships and joys through the different stages of this often wandering journey in search of a better life.

The first part is made up by the three winning stories of the literary contest "A Sea of Words" held since 2008 by the IEMed aimed at young writers aged between 18 and 30 from European and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. They are short stories in which youths share their views and longings from their own societies and in their own languages. The three stories we present here are from the 2021 call, whose motto is "Youth and Mobility. Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Citizenship". The dramaturgy of these fictional texts, written by Hala Kalaban, from Syria; Mohamed Ben Mbarek, from Morocco, and Mahmoud Jamal Ahmed Miqdadi, from Jordan, is paradigmatic, as the young narrators describe diverse realities they come across when setting out on a journey, both for the best and the worst.

In contrast, the articles by Berj Dekramanjian, Kristina Stankova and Qays Wassouf are not fictional because what they write about their personal experience or their relatives or friends is real. The three are currently living in Barcelona and we have had the opportunity to meet them. After describing their own backgrounds, they make a final reflection that does not attempt to show heroism but rather maturity and understanding.

As an Armenian who grew up in Lebanon, the identity of Berj Dekramanjian is partly made up by the constant reminders of his enormous debt incurred just for existing. His maternal great-grandfather, Aram, decided to leave behind his family in Antep, at that

time a city in the Ottoman Empire. This young man full of extravagant hopes to find a better life decided to sail on the sea without having seen it or travelled on it in his life. In his turn, Berj Dekramanjian's decision to leave his Lebanese village, located in the Bekaa Valley, was due to the longing to find a better future because his land was suffering constant political upheavals and altercations which culminated in terrible brawls in the streets of Beirut. "It hasn't been long since I realized," continúes Berj, "the significance of how my forefathers' respective stories end. I have matured enough to accept that going back home might not entail going back. Aram's birthplace was razed, while Puzant's was full of strife with coups and political upheaval. And, in turn, my Lebanon has been scarred with economic upheaval and haunted by the echoes of a blast that obliterated a quarter of Beirut in August of 2020." His story ends with the following words: "In my perpetual journey, I find inexplicable joy knowing I have left pieces of myself at every spot on the path I have taken. And I look forward to times where my past and future selves can meet."

Kristina Stankova's story is different, because she does not talk about her family but about several youths she knew who have also emigrated. Kristina is Bulgarian and, therefore, a citizen of the European Union, and so her travels and life in Barcelona, albeit with hardships, have nothing to do with those of young Moroccans who entered the country in boats or under a truck. She argues that changing our views of the world or of ourselves involves a long journey, and these views make it easy to hate. Stankova believes that, in the common field of society, this change is even slower but she believes it is possible because, as soon as we break down the shield a little, we are all the same: flesh, bones and hopes. Thus, Stankova argues for the fundamental urgency of dialoguing and using all the tools possible to implement a more tolerant migration policy in the Mediterranean, a place that has already witnessed many atrocities.

Qays Wassouf's story is surprising, as he appreciates all the places where he has lived and the people he has met, despite the harsh environments, once he left his native Syria. In his story about the beginning of the journey, he explains how, after finishing university, he spent a few years of hard work and effort, but also full of good memories that he will never forget. He emphasises that he does not remember having attended class much in Syria, first because the roads were dangerous and full of corpses; and, second, because when he was able to go out, he dedicated himself to work day and night to help his family in those terrible conditions, so every time he returned home safe and sound it was like being reborn, like starting a new life full of possibilities. Literature has served as a reflection of his soul, and Wassouf concludes his account as follows: "Whenever I sit alone and take a quick look at the story of my life and my journey, I remember Santiago, the hero of Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*, and Heba, the hero of Youssef Zeidan's novel *Azazel*. And the most important lesson I learned from this journey and all these experiences is to smile and move forward, and live the moment."

The journey can be a means to achieve emotional maturity and knowledge through the adversities of displacement. Loneliness encourages reflection on the difficult creation of

new social relationships. The successful overcoming of obstacles, as manifested in Ulysses and many Mediterranean myths, in addition to medieval travellers and young people who have crossed land and sea, is also a fundamental component of individual and collective memories, many of them lost in the waters of the Mediterranean.

The maturity achieved by these young authors through the journey is made explicit in their own texts. We can end the reflection of this dossier with any of the recommendations that they make. As the poet Antonio Machado said, the path is made by walking. A metaphorical path that is life. A journey full of difficulties and desires, where successfully overcoming obstacles is crucial, choosing the paths well at each crossroads. This crossroads allows, at the same time, a change of direction, a reorganisation. The world can change from a crossroads, from a wrong path taken. Culture gives us tools to avoid it but courage is also needed to clear paths that are sometimes difficult but necessary.

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