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Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. xiv + 445 pp. Notes, figures, notes, bibliography and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-520-25923-2.

Review by Gillian Weiss, Case Western Reserve University.

This past April, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi warned of a “human tsunami” sweeping the Italian island of Lampedusa. Thousands of refugees from North African unrest “are not particularly acceptable,” he announced, promising to deport them within days.[1] News of desperate migrants attempting a northward Mediterranean crossing is tragically familiar, as is their hostile reception on European shores. Less familiar is the history of people who traversed the Inner Sea in the opposite direction during the nineteenth century. They came from Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Greece and other economically marginal or politically volatile places, and sought opportunity in Tunisia. In a rich, occasionally unwieldy but always fascinating study, Julia Ann Clancy-Smith “salvages” (p. 6) stories of these “mobilities and displacements” and examines their effects on a single “borderland society” (pp. 4-5).

Clancy-Smith is one of relatively few Anglophone scholars working in the field of North African history. Her first book, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters*, based mainly on official sources, uncovered the role of Sufi non-violent resistance to French colonial rule.[2] Piecing together a vast array of archival material illuminating the lived experiences of ordinary people, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* takes the reader on an “extended ethnographic voyage” across, above and around the “central Mediterranean corridor” (p. 11) in the years before and after the imposition of an 1881 French Protectorate. Clancy-Smith defines her approach, modeled on Chiara Frugoni’s, as attentive both to “fleeting facts, ostensibly trivial events, petty detail, the mundane, and experienced” and to spaces that “modulated interactions” (p. 9).[3] She defines her purview as the area encompassing eastern Algeria to Tunisia, Marseilles to Leghorn and the islands in between. The result is a descriptive tapestry of information and anecdote, and a theoretically ambitious analysis that proffers new ways of thinking about global migration, Mediterranean modalities, urban environments, gender relations, Tunisian modernity and French colonialism.

Like every other aspect of the book, its organization is multi-faceted. One viewpoint reveals six chapters of prosopography preceding three chapters of more individualized biography. Another distinguishes three parts. The first, made up of chapters entitled “Arrival” and “Detours,” provides an overview of pre-colonial Tunisia and the routes by which various migrants made it their home. From port to polis, we encounter architecture, institutions and residents; discern power structures; observe clothing and hear language with the senses of a newcomer. Returning to the sea, we perceive some of the forces that propelled people from southern Europe to North Africa. The second part, itself a “trilogy devoted to making a living” (pp. 210-211), examines migrant labor on land and at sea. Chapter three is largely about domestic service. Chapter four is about petty trade and sociable places. Chapter five is about contraband. Here are former slaves and belly dancers, physicians and prostitutes, candy makers and tavern keepers, fishermen and smugglers of gunpowder, tobacco and hashish. The third part comprises four chapters on

assorted subjects thematically linked by migration. Chapter six looks at the ways inhabitants negotiated legal pluralism on the ground. Chapter seven investigates the relationship between the Husaynid regime and Christian missionaries, particularly female ones. Chapter eight wades into elite social, diplomatic and medicinal practices at the seaside. Finally, chapter nine focuses on the migratory life history of a Tunisian politician-intellectual.

The book offers critiques of perspective and periodization in standard histories of North Africa, Europe and the body of water in between. In *Mediterraneans*, Clancy-Smith rejects the line in favor of the web, the fixed in favor of the mobile, the foreign in favor of the local, the single in favor of the multiple, the unusual in favor of the everyday, the top-down in favor of the bottom-up. Traditional accounts of the region—with what she identifies as their excessive focus on colonial Algeria, French actors, large demographic shifts, and facile binaries, among other factors—overlook the hundreds of thousands of Europeans who moved to Tunisia. This account (whose author alternates positions of truffle hunter and hang glider, taking in sweeping vistas and intimate close-ups, but always keeping her eyes on the ground) makes the invisible visible. The peoples and practices she unearths together convincingly show that North Africa was never so French, the line between European and North African so clear, nor France and other European states so powerful as previously understood.

Clancy-Smith also objects to sharply drawn divisions between pre-colonial and colonial eras. Instead, she points to continuities across time. In the context of a housing shortage, for instance, former merchant hostels and consular compounds (*funduqs*) were subdivided into cheap rentals for Maltese and Sicilian workers (p. 147) and a former prison for Christian slaves (*bagnio*) was turned into a Christian missionary school for girls (p. 262). Meanwhile, the structure's onetime denizens, now freed, remained attached to the Tunisian palace as servants (p. 107), and their captors, corsairs who once stole people, evolved into smugglers who now concealed goods (p. 171). Some nineteenth-century contraband networks followed much "older cartographies of movement" between Mediterranean ports (p. 195). Some nineteenth-century individuals retained split loyalties, "a common feature of the older Mediterranean system" (p. 216). Many "ways of doing things" depended on longstanding agreed-upon norms (p. 201).

For Clancy-Smith, Tunisia was not a backward, static society suddenly brought into modernity by the French empire. Rather it was a diverse country in motion whose rulers and varied constituencies had long experience haggling over protocols and places of accommodation for migrants. Thus, instead of being able to start afresh, the colonial apparatus faced spatial, occupational, political, conventional and legal constraints.

If the break between pre- and post-1881 seems relatively inconsequential in this account, the one pre- and post-1816 seems relatively important. Here, Lord Exmouth's 1816 naval bombardment of Algiers and visit to Tunis and Tripoli, which virtually brought an end to Christian slavery, indicated more than a shifting power dynamic across the Mediterranean. It was also a "crucible for changing attitudes" about North Africa (p. 70) that helped convert European images of the region from "a site of captivity and apostasy into a migratory labor frontier" (p. 72), from a land of piracy into a land of promise. Tunisia thus became a chosen destination for economic opportunists, curious travelers, Algerian refugees, and Christian missionaries, among others, as well as a newly acceptable "human dump" for Europe's social and political undesirables (p. 94).

The book's overall argument about the centrality of nineteenth-century north-south Mediterranean displacements for understanding both "the grand rhythms" of the modern world (p. 4) and more recent south-north relocations is persuasive. With its expansive definition of "migrant," encompassing voluntary and involuntary, men and women, far-flung and close-by,

the book makes a strong case for magnitude and significance. As a work of urban history, it successfully shows where and how different sorts of people actually lived and worked—in a seaport and, seasonally, by the seaside. By exploring the quotidian uses and misuses of European protection and protégé status, it contributes to historical scholarship on law and diplomacy. Moreover, *Mediterraneans* effectively demonstrates the rippling effects of France’s colonization of Algiers.

Just a few choices of emphasis and order are confusing. The plural title, for example, seems to riff on Fernand Braudel’s singular one, inviting reflection on the “Mediterranean.”<sup>[4]</sup> Yet Clancy-Smith offers more explicit guidance about what it is *not* than about what it is, beyond a literal sea, which to be properly studied needs to be subdivided into comprehensible portions. She makes clear that for nineteenth-century Tunisia, the Mediterranean constituted neither a valid type nor a popular identity, neither a hegemonic colonial space nor a purely Muslim domain. By its focus on people who crossed to a particular place, the book would appear a work of cis- and circum-Mediterranean history, to borrow David Armitage’s Atlantic categories.<sup>[5]</sup> But is it truly a study of “Mediterraneans”?

Clancy-Smith’s decision not to sequester women—or any other group—into a separate chapter fits with her overall principle of depicting the fullest possible social reality. It does, though, make it harder to evaluate her contentions about gendered space and the underestimated female role in the formation of empires. This organizational strategy also leads to occasional inelegant reintroductions of characters and repetition of phrases.

The research that went into this book is absolutely stunning. Yet, only a committed reader will meet Dominique Fassy from Marseilles who worked as a sailmaker for the *bey* and died of plague, abandoning five children to communal and consular charity; and Giovanni Tellini from Pisa, who operated a café from a house where she lived with her Spanish common-law husband and who stashed illegal imports and stolen property for her Greek and Italian accomplices; and Grazia Abela from Malta, who created a scandal when she left her husband for a Tunisian Muslim, converted to Islam, then changed her mind; and Emilie de Vialar from a town near Toulouse, who transplanted to Tunisia the female Catholic order of nurses and teachers she had initially founded in Algeria; and Khayr al-Din from the Caucasus, who spent his life as slave, diplomat, minister, educator and exile in and between Turkey, France and Tunisia.

Even those who do not follow Clancy-Smith on every biographic detour and narrative aside, however, will still appreciate her masterful accomplishment of bringing a nineteenth-century world between two covers. Her achievement is historiographical and also political. Reading this book makes it impossible to think about contemporary migration from North Africa to Europe in the same way.

## NOTES

[1] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/06/italy-north-africa-refugees-lampedusa>

[2] Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[3] Chiara Frugoni, *A Day in a Medieval City*, trans. William McGuaig (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

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[4] Fernard Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[5] David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp.11-27.

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