

Connectivités
(*Connectivities*).

Mucem—Musée des
Civilisations de l'Europe
et de la Méditerranée,

Marseille, June 29, 2020–
December 31, 2021.

Curator: Myriame Morel-
Deledalle in collaboration
with Sylvia Amar-Gonzalez,
Jean-Roch Bouiller, and
Emilie Girard

In 2013, Marseille was the European Capital of Culture, and as it happened in Istanbul during its own tenure in 2010, it became a lively hub of culture and arts for not only Europe but also the whole Mediterranean region. Having been an important port town for centuries, Marseille has been a hub for cultural and commercial encounters, and at the same time, served as a point

of contagion and smuggling. As a result of its lively and fervent history, Marseille was the perfect candidate to host a museum of European and Mediterranean civilizations. Inaugurated in 2013, Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations, known as Mucem) is the first—and for now the only—national museum in France situated outside Paris.

Established on and around the oldest remaining parts of historical Marseille, Mucem commenced an on-going but constantly renewed and altered semi-permanent exhibition called *Connectivités* (*Connectivities*) in November 2018. Its latest edition started on June 29, 2020 and can be visited until December 31, 2021. Occupying the ground floor of the J4 building, which harbors a view of both the Mediterranean Sea and Fort Saint Jean (a castle, now part of the museum, dating back to the twelfth century), *Connectivities* reveals the network of Mediterranean port cities of the sixteenth and seven-

teenth centuries (Istanbul, Venice, Algiers, Genoa, Seville, and Lisbon) and juxtaposes those cities (or encircles them) with their counterparts of the twenty-first (Cairo, Istanbul, Casablanca, and Marseille).

In 2000, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell wrote *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, one of the first attempts to provide a total history of the Mediterranean after Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. Furthermore, Horden and Purcell argued that the Mediterranean is shaped by two concepts, fragmentation and connectivity, in a fundamental disagreement with Braudel's thesis of unity and distinctiveness.¹ Drawing upon both Horden and Purcell, and Braudel's work—and borrowing the former's concept connectivity as its title—*Connectivities* tells the story of the Mediterranean in two separate but porous itineraries. In the middle, we follow the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cities of the Mediter-



Figure 1: *Philippe II, king of Spain*, after Alonso Sanchez-Coello, sixteenth century. Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

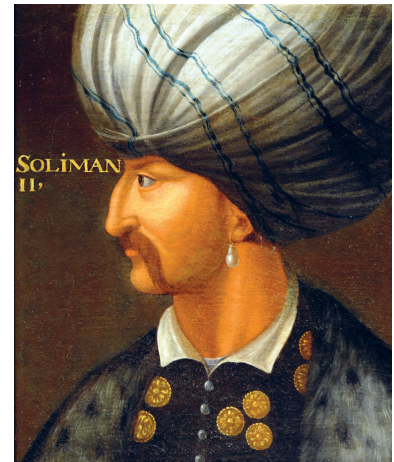


Figure 2: *Suleiman the Magnificent*, oil on canvas. Galerie des Illustres, ca. 1620s., Paul Ardier, the treasurer of the king of France. Parc et Château de Beauregard.



Figure 3: *Connectivities*, Mucem. Photograph: Agnès Mellon, 2017.



Figure 4: *Connectivities*, Mucem. Photograph: Agnès Mellon, 2017.

reanean with occasional stops where you can watch and listen to Braudel talk about the subject matter; whereas, at the periphery, we follow the twenty-first century cities—with possibilities to jump forward or back a few centuries to break the linear narrative of the exhibition at the spectator's will.

Both itineraries choose to tell their story via cities, thus employing an urban history approach. However, it also reflects the Mediterranean as a network of not only cities but also commerce, plague, slavery, and ideas. It relies on the ideas of connectivity

where “things,” including people, are able and/or compelled to move as a result of changing dynamics in the production of goods and the political power. Focusing on concepts (such as Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry, piracy, slavery, consumer goods, etc.) and their change with respect to time, rather than moments and events, curators of *Connectivities* handle their subject matter in an approach that could be considered thus as global history, while also comparing it to Annales School’s *longue durée*: first by showing us how commercial and cultural goods moved around the Mediterranean and transformed in time and how these

exchanges brought the advent of modernity; and second, in a more literal approach, by apposing two Mediterranean worlds five centuries apart.

The central itinerary of *Connectivities* has a variety of objects: various coins and jewelry used around the Mediterranean; ceramic plates and other everyday objects; portraits of Süleyman I, François I, and Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha; lithographic panoramas of Istanbul and other cities; and faithful models of cities (e.g., an impressive Algiers) and ships, all positioned in a way to reflect different passages of time for different fragments and networks and levels of association rather than promulgating an idea of one common linear time.

The peripheral itinerary focuses on “contemporary port territories like the megalopolises of Istanbul and Cairo and the metropolises of Marseille and Casablanca” as stated in the catalogue.² According to the curator, Myriame Morel-Deledalle, who is a historian and archaeologist by training, these four cities are exhibited on the same scale and detailed by the exhibition in terms of topography, urbanization, traffic, and infrastructure. This itinerary offers documents, informative videos, models, and maps, together with contemporary artworks and objects installed in an artwork fashion, which reflects on and questions the current state of the cities. Curators have chosen to display what human agency and rapid urbanization, which—they hope to show—were brought into play in the sixteenth century, have done over the last five centuries. It is not a critique of modernity whatsoever. The Mediterranean has lost its importance as the center of the world although the networks it once harbored have now been embraced by the megacities along its coast. Each of these megacities of the twenty-first century might have a larger population than the whole Mediterranean of the sixteenth century. The urban agglomeration of people and the expansion of cities led to uncontrolled and unsustainable cities. In an urban studies/planning approach, the exhibition surveys the problems and brings together various responses to

them both in the context of art and urban politics. In this itinerary, for instance, visitors are able to watch İmre Azem's 2011 documentary *Ecumenopolis*, which is about housing rights and the out of control construction business in Istanbul, and delve into the municipal efforts/projects undertaken for a more sustainable Casablanca.

The exhibition also questions the idea of where (or what, if more relevant) is the Mediterranean. Including two cities that are port towns (Lisbon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and Casablanca of the twenty-first) despite having no coastline on the Mediterranean Sea, *Connectivities* puts forward the idea that the Mediterranean is not a geographically determined place. Far from being a closed circuit system of associations, it is an exchange network, with close connections and input-output relations to Egypt, the Red Sea, Iran, and India, as well as to the Atlantic Ocean.

As with all exhibitions, *Connectivities* comes with its shortfalls, too. The artifacts and objects exhibited belong to many museums from France and Europe (as well as Mucem's own collections). Although it tries to tell an encompassing story, including Northern Africa and Ottoman Empire/Turkey into its narrative, the exhibition lacks actual content from the museums of these regions. Every artifact coming from these regions are chosen, sorted, and conserved through a European perspective. In addition, some of the panoramas and paintings used in the first itinerary have no purpose other than as decoration, since they were created in the nineteenth century. Another important point is the absence of people. We can trace the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry, for instance, through personages such as Süleyman I, Barbaros, Philip II or François I, or we can follow the journey of consumer goods across the Mediterranean with information such as the types of ships used in commerce. However, we have no idea who the merchants or producers/consumers of those goods were.



Figure 5: *Connectivities*, Mucem. Photograph: Agnès Mellon, 2017.



Figure 6: Serkan Taycan, *Between Two Seas*, 51. km, 41° 3.173'N - 28° 44.905'E, 2013.

Apart from its shortcomings, *Connectivities* is a valuable attempt to question geographical and historiographical themes such as *longue durée* and the limits of the Mediterranean world, and delves into history in the scope of an exhibition. Although students of Mediterranean history might find it slightly trivial, it might definitely attract the attention of those who wish to learn about the complex, entangled, vigorous, and surprising history of *our sea*, the *mare nostrum*.

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1 Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 89–173.

2 Mucem, *Connectivités, Exposition, Dossier pédagogique* (2018), 6, accessed October 9, 2020, https://www.mucem.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/Mucem_dossier_peda_connectivites.pdf.