Werk

Titel: About Rural Landescapes: The Invention of the Mediterranean and the French School...

Autor: Claval , Paul

Ort: Berlin

Jahr: 2007

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?385984391_0138|LOG_0007

Kontakt/Contact

Digizeitschriften e.V.
SUB Göttingen
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 1
37073 Göttingen

info@digizeitschriften.de

DIE ERDE **138** 2007 (1)	Special Issue: Mediterranean Landscapes	pp. 7-23

• *Landscape – Rural areas – The Mediterranean – French Geography*

Paul Claval (Paris)

About Rural Landscapes: The Invention of the Mediterranean and the French School of Geography

Über ländliche Landschaften: Die Erfindung des Mittelmeerraumes und die französische Geographie

As a specific category of aesthetic experience, the Mediterranean was invented at the time of impressionism and post-impressionism. In the same period, *Vidal de la Blache* and his followers developed the geographical analysis of Mediterranean landscapes – mainly rural ones – based on their forms and their associated *genres de vie*. In the interwar period, French geographers, *Jules Sion* for instance, took advantage of the work of Roman agronomists. They discovered that the latters' categories were still useful for understanding Mediterranean landscapes. *Cato*, *Varro* or *Columella* distinguished a trilogy of land uses – *ager, saltus* and *silva*. The *ager* itself was characterised by the Mediterranean triad: wheat (or barley), vine and olive trees. The discovery of agrarian structures in the rural landscapes allowed a systematisation of these results; within less than twenty years, the understanding of traditional landscapes in the Mediterranean world gained much in depth. According to these perspectives, the southern Mediterranean environments could be treated like their northern counterparts. In the second half of the twentieth century, the modernisation of farming techniques deprived this form of analysis from a part of its relevance. With the new interest in sustained growth, experts are now becoming aware of the permanent balance which the old agrarian systems – and landscape forms – ensured in poorly endowed areas.

1. Introduction

The discovery of a new scenery is always a fundamental experience. For *Goethe*, aesthetic emotion was exalted by the Mediterranean: *Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn?* For most people coming from North-Western, Northern or Central Europe, travelling to the Mediterranean was the main opportunity for discovering strangeness.

The first painting from the Renaissance which gives us the feeling of a Mediterranean environment is a watercolour, the small "View of Arco" (Paris, Louvre). It was not the work of an Italian artist. *Dürer* travelled to Venice in 1494.

After passing Trento on his way to the south, he encountered the Mediterranean environment at Arco, 6 km to the north of Lake Garda, he stopped and painted the hillock, with its fortress, which is still there, and the olive trees and the vines in the foreground and on the slopes. The leaves of his olive trees are not green, their colour is a mixture of green and grey – strange for someone coming from the north.

The reflection of geographers was often fuelled by their confrontation with new sceneries. For French geographers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Mediterranean played a central role.

2. The Changing Conceptions of the Mediterranean

2.1 The Mediterranean: strangeness and exoticism

Touring to the Mediterranean countries has a long tradition in European countries. In the Middle Ages, people went to Jerusalem or Rome as pilgrims. Since the Renaissance, young British aristocrats travelled to Venice, Florence and Rome in order to discover fine arts, beauty, the ruins of Rome and the paintings, sculptures and architecture of Italian artists. The emphasis was not on nature, but on culture. The northern half of the Italian peninsula and Provence in France were the only Mediterranean countries to be included into the 'Grand Tour'.

A double change occurred during the 18th century: (i) Because of the new infatuation with sublime landscapes, the Alpine ranges north of the Mediterranean countries began to attract visitors – especially in Switzerland, Savoy and Austria. (ii) Because of the progress of archaeology, the southern ends of the Mediterranean peninsulas, the Kingdom of Naples in Italy and Greece, were incorporated into the 'Grand Tour'. Such an extension had important consequences, since at the same time travellers to Athens and other Greek sites discovered the Turkish Empire.

In the first decades of the 19th century, the Mediterranean was valued both because it had hosted the classical civilisations of antiquity and the Renaissance, and because it offered the possibility to discover the Orient and the Muslim world. Painting reflected this double sensibility: French artists like *Corot* still acquired part of their training and their sensibility to ruins and landscapes when in the Villa Medici in Rome; others travelled to Algeria (*Eugène Fromentin*), Morocco (*Eugène Delacroix*) or Egypt to paint more colourful civilisations. They paralleled *Bonington's* interest in orientalism.

The central element in this curiosity was the search for exoticism. People discovered it either in the archaic forms of Ancient civilisations or in the Muslim part of the Mediterranean. Scholars, especially in Germany, reinterpreted classical Greece. Athens was praised because it was both the cradle of democracy and a place where the very original forms of behaviour, art and religiosity were expressed.

Until the 1870s or 1880s, the Mediterranean was conceived as a kind of container where it was possible to discover quite different forms of scenery and civilisation. All the countries of the area shared some common attributes like the quality of their light and their hot summers. This, however, was not enough for transforming the Mediterranean into a coherent entity.

The transformation of landscape painting which occurred during the second half of the 19th century did not start in the Mediterranean; in France, the realists like *Courbet*, the School of Barbizon and the early impressionists drew their inspiration from the rural areas of temperate France or from the shores of the Channel. Some of the pre-impressionists as *Frédéric Bazille* or impressionists as *Paul Cézanne* came

from Mediterranean France, but the Mediterranean light was too strong and stable at a time when people saw pictorial truth in the reflection of the sun on water or in the nuances of shades (*Rewald* 1955; Varii Auctores 1985).

2.2 The Mediterranean as an entity: a late-19th century theme

Attitudes changed rapidly at the end of the 19th century. Impressionism was replaced by new movements, for which light played a different role; it ceased to be appreciated mainly because of its mobility. It seduced because of the strength it gave to colours. It was in the 1870s that Mediterranean landscapes really began to attract French painters: Most of *Paul Cézanne's* Mediterranean landscapes, like the Estaque Gulf and the Sainte-Victoire Mountain, were painted in the 1880s and 1890s. *Claude Monet's* "Antibes, effets d'après-midi" (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts) was painted in 1888. *Paul Signac* discovered Saint-Tropez and Collioure during the 1880s ("Le Clocher" [Collioure], 1887, Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum). *Pierre-Auguste Renoir* travelled to Bordighera and Antibes in the 1880s, visited the French Riviera regularly in the 1890s and settled in Cagnes-sur-Mer in 1903.

The real turning point in the attitude of painters towards the Mediterranean was the short period of 1886-1888. The main phase of impressionism was over. The success of *Seurat's* and *Signac's* pointillism bore testimony to the rise of a new curiosity. It was in 1886 that Pont-Aven began to attract young artists looking for new perspectives. *Gauguin* left Pont-Aven to spend a few months in Arles in 1888, where *Vincent van Gogh* had stayed from 1887. In *Vincent's* paintings, light gave an heroic strength to the gold of sunflowers or the wheat burnt by a mad sun. The Mediterranean as an entity came to birth because through its light it revealed the deep quality of things and beings (Varii Auctores 2000).

The idea that the Mediterranean was not only a container but owned a deep unity encountered many echoes at that time. This was the result of the growing attention given to ancient Greece, its religion and its institutions. At a time when Christianity began to be criticized for its condemnation of sex, Greek paintings and writings spoke of a country where nudity was praised, the human body was exalted by the practice of sport, and where religion was in harmony with nature. For Western people, it offered one of the ways to explore radical forms of estrangement (on this quest for all forms of exoticism, see *Staszak* 2003). As an echo to these themes, naturism began to flourish among German people, who moved to submediterranean Italian Switzerland or Northern Italy to live freely, without any garment, during the long hot summer. Olympic Games were reintroduced by *Pierre de Coubertin* in 1893. Tourism, for long aimed at the discovery of classical places and civilisations, turned to the more simple pleasures of living in the sun and – increasingly – of sea-bathing. The development of the French Riviera – and, to a lesser degree, the Italian shoreline and the coast of Roussillon – accelerated from the 1890s on.

The idea of the Mediterranean as a fundamental cultural unit took advantage of the progress of colonisation: European powers were taking control of the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea: Algeria (from 1830), Tunisia (in 1881), Morocco (from 1900), Egypt (1881), Cyprus (1878), Libya (1912), Crete (1912). With colonisation, the romantic dimension of orientalism disappeared: The southern and eastern countries increasingly appeared as impoverished societies, with splendid monuments, but dirty and polluted urban environments. Many French people visited Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt as tourists. They enjoyed Egyptian and Greek ruins in Egypta and Roman relicts in Tunisia, Eastern Algeria and Morocco. The fine colours of some villages, like the "Andalus" settlements in Tunisia, Sidi bou Said for instance, enraptured them. Most of the tour-

ists came back, however, with the conviction that the only true civilisation was the Western. Oriental exoticism had lost a good part of its appeal.

Ethnographers discovered the deep similarities in the rural societies on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. Kabyl people in Algeria still used the Julian calendar. The relation to the land, the role of familial ties, an ethics of honour were often similar in Christian and Moslem countries. Hence the idea that in the near future the Mediterranean will recover the unity it had in Roman times.

San Agaro is a marvellous sea resort north of Barcelona, which was planned for the Catalonian bourgeoisie around 1900. The idea was to offer the new elite a "true" Mediterranean environment. The result was achieved through the incorporation of Greek and Roman features (colonnades, pediments), but also of vernacular forms (pergolas, for instance) into the architecture. The atmosphere of the place evokes some of the paintings by *Puvis de Chavannes* ("Massilia colonie grecque", 1868, Washington, Phillips Collection; "Doux Pays", 1882, Bayonne, Musée; "Le Bois sacré cher aux arts et aux muses", 1884, Lyon, Musée). San Agaro was a place to live dressed with a light Greek tunic. It was not conceived as a Christian community, but as a place for worshipping both Apollo and Dionysus (as shown in "Au temps d'harmonie" by *Paul Signac*, 1893-1895, Mairie de Montreuil; in "Euridyce" by *Maurice Denis*, 1903-1904, Berlin, Staatliche Museen; or "Scène antique" by *Ker-Xavier Roussel*, 1920-1925, Paris, Petit Palais).

2.3 New ways of travelling

In the second half of the 19th century, because of the new facilities offered by railways, the experience of the Mediterranean also changed. Until the mid-19th century, most people used stagecoaches and, when possible, boats. They moved slowly, but the conditions of comfort and visibility were such that they could not really enjoy the rural areas they went through. They did not stop to look at the local churches, convents or castles. Travel guides of the first half of the 19th century focused on cities – with a few natural marvels in between, a lake, a waterfall, a cave ...

Some travellers preferred to ride their horses, e. g. *Arthur Young* visiting France just before and during the French Revolution: hence his sensitivity to the French landscape. The poorest part of the population had to move afoot – this is one of the reasons for which *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, a fantastic walker, was more open to the charm of the countryside than most of his contemporaries. In the mountainous areas, especially to get over a pass, people had either to walk or to ride a mule, one of the reasons why travellers became conscious of the nature and beauty of alpine environments earlier than others.

Travelling by rail offered totally new conditions for enjoying landscapes: It was possible to look at them through clean windows, comfortably seated. Thanks to slow trains, you could stop at any station and walk into the neighbourhood. Because of the multiplication of hotels and private accommodation you could stay for a while in most areas. Landscape painting owed much to these new facilities, as did geography.

Two other innovations contributed to the growing interest in rural areas: (i) People started to ride bicycles to explore rural roads by the 1890s. They experienced a new form of freedom in this way. (ii) Postcards fixed the features of small villages or modest landmarks, and diffused them among all parts of the population.

Geography reflected the evolution of Western sensibility and technologies: At the time painters invented the Mediterranean landscape as a form of dreamed beyond, *Vidal de la Blache* provided a synthetic interpretation of the unity and diver-

sity of the Mediterranean landscapes, mainly rural: He invented a geographical, unitary vision of the Mediterranean. We wish to trace back the genesis of *Vidal de la Blache*'s interpretation.

3. French Geographers and the Invention of the Mediterranean Landscape: the First Step

3.1 A special relation to the Mediterranean

For about one tenth of its area, France is Mediterranean. Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia also straddle the boundary between Mediterranean and Oceanic or Continental climates – but in France, the bulk of the country is non-Mediterranean and the dominating culture is not Mediterranean.

Travelling through the climatic divide between non-Mediterranean and Mediterranean regions was as meaningful for the French as for German, English or Scandinavian people, but the existence of a Mediterranean France was a real problem for them: How was it possible to be a Frenchman and to live in so different an environment? What was the specific contribution of Provence, Corsica or Mediterranean Languedoc to French culture and civilisation?

These questions became really significant during the 19th century because of the increased mobility. The proportion of people with a direct experience of the diversity of France and the contrast between its Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean parts grew rapidly from the 1850s when the railway network really began to operate.

3.2 French geographers in the Mediterranean

Many French geographers had personal reasons to be interested in Mediterranean questions. Some were Mediterranean.

(i) *Paul Vidal de la Blache* was born in Pézenas, a small city in the Mediterranean part of Languedoc, in 1845. Later his father bought a second home in Lauraguais, at the transition between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic part of Languedoc. For *Vidal de la Blache* it was the home of the family; he visited it every year. His wife and children spent the summer holidays there, while *Vidal* visited France and the countries around.

Paul Vidal was sent to Paris when he was 10 years old in order to benefit from the best secondary schools in France. Later, when leaving the "Ecole Normale Supérieure", he was appointed to the "Ecole Française d'Athènes", which was (and still is) an institution for the development of historical and archaeological research. He spent four years in Athens and travelled all over Asia Minor in order to prepare his Ph. D. on Roman funeral inscriptions. He was still a historian at that time, but became a geographer thanks to *Carl Ritter's* volume on this part of the world.

Vidal de la Blache's first paper, written in 1873, is a geopolitical essay: "La péninsule européenne. L'Océan et la Méditerranée". For 45 years, he visited the Mediterranean countries again and again and wrote about them: in his paper "Des rapports entre les populations et le climat sur les bords européens de la Méditerranée" (1886), in his book "Etats et Nations d'Europe. Autour de la France" (1889), in his "Tableau de la géographie de la France" (1903) and in his paper "Les grands agglomérations humaines. Régions méditerranéennes" (1918, the year of his death; the paper was incorporated into "Principes de géographie humaine", 1922). The evolution of his ideas can be followed by comparing these texts.

(ii) *Fernand Braudel* was born in a small village in Eastern France in 1902 and raised in

Paris. He discovered the Mediterranean when appointed as a young teacher to Algeria, first to Constantine and then to Algiers (1923-1932). His second wife was a Frenchwoman from North Africa; her parents were settlers in Tiaret, on the high plains of Algeria. When *Braudel* was prisoner of war in Germany during World War II, his wife and children stayed in Tiaret. *Braudel* worked on his doctoral dissertation: "La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II" from the early 1930s till 1949, and stayed for months in Spain, Italy and Yugoslavia during this time (*Braudel* 1949). For the rest of his life the Mediterranean remained one of his major interests (*Braudel* 1977, 1989, 1996, 1998).

(iii) Many other geographers developed special links to the Mediterranean. *Jean Brunhes* chose to study irrigation in North Africa and Spain. *Jules Sion*, born in northern France, had prepared his Ph.D. on Normandy, but was then appointed to the University of Montpellier, where he stayed for his entire career. He developed a strong interest in Mediterranean France, Italy and Greece (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934). *Max Sorre* also came from northern France, but chose to work on the biogeography of the eastern part of the Pyrenees, both in France and Spain (*Sorre* 1913), for his doctoral dissertation and became a specialist on Spain (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934). *Pierre Birot* discovered the Mediterranean when working on the geomorphology of the eastern part of the Pyrenees, and developed his interest through his long visits to Portugal and Spain (*Birot* and *Dresch* 1953). *Daniel Faucher,* the first geographer in France to be considered a specialist in rural geography, was born in the Mediterranean part of the Rhone valley and worked mainly in Toulouse, close to the Mediterranean part of Languedoc (*Faucher* 1927). From the 1930s the number of theses on the Mediterranean kept growing (for instance *George* 1935, *Le Lannou* 1942).

3.3 How to define the Mediterranean?

Geographers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries shared a general enthusiasm for the Mediterranean. This was clearly visible in many of their texts. Describing Liguria, *Reclus* wrote:

> "The shore spread out from cape to cape through a succession of curves with regular profiles, but all different by the thousand details of rocks, beaches, cultures, forms of settlement ... Here, one follows the beach in the shade of tamarisk with pink blossoms, and the flow, which breaks close to the road, traces its hem of foam; elsewhere, one rises from curve to curve on rocks that farmers had transformed into terraces of farmland, and one sees, far away, through the enlaced branches of the olive trees, the bluish circle of the sea moving back each time further to the horizon, until the vaporous profile of the mountains of Corsica. From the ridge of the cape, one follows with one's eyes the rhythmic oscillations of the coast, which follow one another around the gulf, with all the gradation of light and hue, which rays, shades, haze and space give them" (*Reclus* 1883: 391)[1].

Jules Sion remarked in the same way:

> "The enchantment which seizes the traveller coming down from the North towards the shore of the Mediterranean Sea is one of those impressions men never get tired of. The transparency of the atmosphere, the serenity of the violet sea shimmered by the breeze, the nobleness of mountains instil in us a feeling of happy fullness and ban from our soul everything which is not harmony and beauty. He who departs from these shores always keeps a nostalgic memory of them" (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934: 2).

As their contemporaries, geographers liked the Mediterranean but had a problem with defining it. *Vidal de la Blache's* example is particularly

clear. In "La péninsule europeéenne, l'Océan et la Méditerranée", he presented the Mediterranean mainly as a container open to the competition of the great powers of the time. He had, however, the feeling that he was missing an essential part of reality when proceeding in this way. Thus he added:

> "The vine and the olive tree still compose, in spite of the devastation brought in by deforestation, the characteristic finery of the Mediterranean shores. The similarity of the vegetation of these opposite coasts expresses the unity of the theatre where the historic life of Ancient people unfolded" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1873: 13).

What was behind this unity? The light as an expression of the climate and as a factor of human behaviour? *Vidal de la Blache* pondered over this question: "It is difficult to evaluate what the clearness of the sky, the drought of the air might have put in the constitution and the soul of its inhabitants", but concludes: "The science of these relations is not made" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1903: 349). He relied on a more material element: the new understanding of the Mediterranean nature brought up by the research of German climatologist *Theobald Fischer* (1879) and French botanist *Charles Flahaut* (*Durand* and *Flahaut* 1886). "The European shores [of the Mediterranean] have a climate which, even in Southern Europe, is characterised by very special features" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1886: 401). The long summer drought is the main characteristic of this area. The apparent generosity of nature is an illusion. It is hard to extract from such an environment all the food which human beings require. Hence *Vidal de la Blache's* interest in the rural component of the Mediterranean landscape: In order to understand the way Mediterranean societies were built and functioned, geographers had to start from here. They had to acknowledge a fundamental fact: "In order to make nature propitious and productive, the farmer on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea had [...] to work very hard: to root out a tenacious bush, clean the soil and meliorate it by providing a way out for water and preventing the formation of marshes that the heat of the sun make stinking and unhealthy" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1886: 413).

3.4 The Mediterranean rural landscape and its significant units according to Vidal de la Blache

At the time *Vidal de la Blache* stressed the significance of Mediterranean rural landscapes, geographers had no efficient tools to analyse them – the notion of the importance of agrarian systems for the landscape had still to be developed. *Vidal de la Blache* chose to focus on the techniques and practices used by Mediterranean farmers to cultivate their environment. To cope with the summer drought, they had to resort to grains which could be cropped early in spring, to trees with roots long enough to draw water from deep reserves, or to a pastoral life which relied on transhumance or nomadism to provide flocks and herds with good pastures all through the year.

Vidal de la Blache observed:

> "In the Mediterranean region the physical nature lent itself well to types of activities which have a very diverse influence on population: the culture of cereals such as barley and wheat, the culture of small trees, initially vines, fig trees and olive trees, and pastoral sheep- or cattle-breeding" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1922: 81).

Each milieu was exploited according to a specific *genre de vie.* For *Vidal de la Blache*, the diversified solutions to the fundamental ecological problem people had to face in the Mediterranean world had two important consequences: (i) Each form of agricultural exploitation generates a rural landscape associated with a particular natu-

ral environment: the fields of grain growers on the plains, high plains and plateaus; vineyards and orchards on the hills and high piedmonts; pastoral land both in the mountains grazed by sheep and goats during summer, and in the marshlands and low plains used in winter time. (ii) Mediterranean nature was avaricious, none of its rural landscape units was able to meet the needs of its population. As a consequence, migration and trade developed and, in turn, were responsible for the development of higher-scale communities and the rise of states.

Vidal de la Blache's vision of the Mediterranean rural landscape was central to his interpretation of the Mediterranean countries: Mediterranean civilisations were based on the local units which provided Mediterranean populations with the grain, fruit, meat and cheese they needed – but always on a restricted scale. To develop wealthier and more complex societies, people had to rely on long-distance economic relations, the activity of cities and the organisation of political structures.

Just like the artists who were discovering "the Mediterranean" at that time, *Vidal de la Blache* started from the prevalence of blue skies and a fantastic light all around the "Inner Sea". But this fundamental unity was also responsible for Mediterranean diversity. The Mediterranean was a mosaic of rural landscapes with very different environments: often unhealthy lowlands, pastoral mountains, densely inhabited hills or low plateaus, rivieras. Each of these milieus was exploited in such a way that it contributed to the solution of the same universal problem: the long summer drought. *Vidal de la Blache's* interpretation was in harmony with the dominant perspective at that time: a vision of the Mediterranean as an immutable scenery where history unfolded without introducing major changes – the idea of a fundamental unity, too.

The bases of *Vidal de la Blache's* interpretation of rural landscapes were laid down in the mid-1880s (*Vidal de la Blache* 1886, 1889). They were accepted and progressively enriched by his followers. This type of interpretation predated the idea of the agrarian landscape.

4. Agrarian Structures and the Analysis of Mediterranean Rural Landscapes

The discovery of agrarian structures occurred late in French geography. It dated from the publication of *Marc Bloch's* "Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française" (1931) and *Roger Dion's* "Essai sur la formation du paysage rural français" (1934). The interest in agrarian landscape was in fact older for Mediterranean landscapes than for others – but it had taken a different form. It was based on evidence provided by ancient authors.

4.1 A permanent reference to ancient Greek and Roman interpretations

The idea that the forms of exploitation which can be observed in the Mediterranean were developed a long time ago was shared by *Vidal de la Blache* and most of the Vidalians. In order to understand the diversity of the rural organisation of the Mediterranean, *Vidal de la Blache* looked towards classical literature:

> "This classification [into grain farming, arboriculture and pastoral life] lay on a very old distinction: it is present in *Cicero*, as an old dictum ("De Republica" 5, 2: *ager, arvus, arbustus, pascuus)*. Between 'the land of seed' and the 'land of trees', the distinction was current among the ancients [...]. For pastoral life, it involves not only a differentiation, but an opposition. It is the basis of an antagonism which had struck all the observers from *Thucydides* to *Strabo*, and had persisted, in a softened way, until today" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1922: 82).

Jules Sion noted:

> "In most Mediterranean regions, the farming technique varied so little that the scenes represented on the shield of *Achilles* are present in "Mireille" [a poem by *Frédéric Mistral*, 1859]. The light swing plough of homeric times still scratches the soil in many places" (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934: 38).

Sion also wrote: "Ancient Greece practiced the two-year crop rotation system, one year of wheat and one year of fallow. Modern Greece remained faithful to it" (*Sorre and Sion* 1934: 38). Twenty years later, *Birot* remarked: "Concerning the fundamental techniques, all in all they varied very little since the time of *Virgil* and *Varro*" (*Birot* and *Dresch* 1953: 95).

The references to Roman texts had a deep significance. They showed that Mediterranean agriculture was based on two "trilogies": first, the "trilogy" of the cultivated plants: wheat, olive tree and vine; second, the trilogy of land uses as represented by the Roman terms of *ager, saltus* and *silva*. It expressed the existence of Mediterranean infield/outfield structures.

Maurice Aymard stressed this structural dimension of Mediterranean agriculture:

> "From Rome to the present, the same division of land remained basically valid. On the one side, the cultivated fields: the *ager*. On the other side, the uncultivated land, a mixture of trees and poor grass, of copses and rocks, a domain of charcoal burners, shepherds and domestic and wild animals: the *saltus*. But the *ager* itself needed long periods of rest and was used one year out of two or two out of three to pasture sheep, which, when the crop was over, invaded the stubble fields and were glad to stay there, while they were strictly excluded from the gardens and vineyards" (*Aymard* in *Braudel* 1977, quoted after the 1985 re-edition: 192f.).

The reference to antiquity helped to understand the structural properties of Mediterranean rural landscapes. The tilled part of the land, the *ager*, was made of both the "land of seed" and the "land of trees", *arvus* and *arbustus*. Outside it, the Mediterranean shrub, *maquis* or *garrigues*, or the Mediterranean dry forest, the *monte* of Spanish Estramadura or Portuguese Alentejo for instance, was used as rough grazing area. Fire was extensively used for regenerating fodder grass and prevented the *saltus* from reverting to forest. The third part of the landscape, the *silva* or forest, was also the most fragile, since it was permanently threatened by the inroads of shepherds using fire to enlarge the area which could be grazed. It was the domain of wood cutters, charcoal burners and hunters.

This structural organisation is fundamental when studying Mediterranean landscapes. It had to be completed by a lower-scale analysis – that of the field system itself.

4.2 Mediterranean field systems

Marc Bloch and *Roger Dion* became aware of the inadequacy of the tools they had developed in Northern, Central or Western Europe when dealing with Mediterranean landscapes. They noted the prevalence of two-year crop rotation, with a fallow every second year. When comparing the open fields of Northern France with those of the Mediterranean region, *Jules Sion* discovered analogies, but important differences as well:

> "The cadastral maps of Southern France do not offer this regular impression that is seen in Northern France, the long and parallel fields, with strict regulations concerning crop rotation and communal grazing. Here, lots have more varied forms and dimensions; they are distributed in a haphazard way around the village" (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934: 124).

French geographers worked hard to decipher the field structure of Mediterranean regions during the 1930s and 1940s. It soon appeared that in many areas, the categories developed in Northern and Central Europe could be used: Mediterranean agrarian landscapes could be analysed as infield/outfield systems, *ager* versus *saltus* or *silva*, even if the structures of their infields and outfields differed from those observed elsewhere in Europe.

Open fields were present in many high plateaus with open landscapes. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Xavier de Planhol* worked on the transformation of nomadic tribes into sedentary farmers in Central Anatolia (*Planhol* 1958). They were creating new open field systems, with compulsory rotations. The distinctiveness of the high surfaces devoted to wheat and barley growing – high plains (or plateaus) of Anatolia, Algeria or Spain; Moroccan meseta, Spanish Castile – was acknowledged for the first time.

New categories had to be developed concerning other areas. *Jules Sion* stressed this fact for Italy:

> "A common feature of most Italian rural areas is the extent of *coltura promiscua,* especially in their richest regions. Allowing for exceptions, fallow lands signal either a backward farming system (inner Sicily) or a pioneer one (recent polders); 'specialised vineyards' are small, except in Montferrat, Puglie and Sicily. As a consequence, people normally do not find the monotony of Beauce or Languedoc, but this variety of nice details, this feeling of multifarious wealth, which charms around Pistoia or Perugia. There are a thousand ways to prune trees and conduct vine. Either it creeps among wheat and remains low, as in Languedoc, or is fastened up to reeds or more or less high poles, sometimes it is spread out on vine arbours; more often, married with elm, maple or poplar trees, it runs from one to the other as a curtain of greenery of vine branches" (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934: 247).

By the mid-1950s *Pierre Birot* proposed a complex typology of Mediterranean rural landscapes. He distinguished 16 categories on his map of land uses in the Mediterranean countries (*Birot* and *Dresch* 1953: 104f.). In order to make its presentation clearer, he proposed to derive the diverse modes of land use from "two fundamental combinations" which were most often realised:

> "(i) Intensive polyculture associated with fields with many trees, dispersed farms, small ownership or long-leasehold tenancy, no collective regulations. (ii) Cereal monoculture and extensive cattle or sheep-breeding, specialised orchards when tree culture exists, villages, large farms, or small short-leasehold tenancy, frequent open field" (*Birot* and *Dresch* 1953: 114).

Such an opposition allowed a simplified view, but the impression of a very complex reality did not disappear completely. As a result, many geographers preferred to stick to the Vidalian model which offered an interpretation of landscapes and regional organisation at the same time. It had, however, to be adapted to the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean; *Vidal de la Blache* had mainly reflected on its northern shores.

5. The Second Generation of French Geographers and Mediterranean Rural Landscapes

Vidal de la Blache was aware of the contrast between the northern and southern sides of the Mediterranean Sea. He considered that the peculiarity of the South was imported:

> "The work of the Arabs, which survived their domination, has [...] contributed to the reinforcement of the southern character of the Mediterranean. In these countries, which, in their primitive state, appeared to oriental people as a land of forests and pastures, it succeeded in putting into the foreground the orchard and

the garden, the proliferating life which owed much to the delicate art that Persians and Arabs had pushed to perfection" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1918: 93).

Vidal de la Blache never addressed the role of nomadism in the southern part of the Mediterranean. The second generation of French geographers, however, was fully aware of its role and produced modified versions of the Vidalian model adapted to the peculiarities of the southern and eastern Mediterranean environments.

5.1 Emile-Félix Gautier and the role of nomads on the southern shores of the Mediterranean

The French geographers who worked on North Africa relied on the typology of landscapes provided by *Vidal*. There were strong farming societies in the coastal hills of north-eastern Tunisia and Algeria. Mountainous areas differed in some way from their equivalent in the northern Mediterranean countries, since they were mainly oriented toward the production of grain and fruit and their farmers practiced only local forms of sheep and goat breeding. The open high plains were mainly devoted to wheat or barley growing. The main difference lay in the role of the nomads: Instead of flocks of sheep and goats guided by some shepherds – as was the case in transhumance –, whole tribes moved between the northern edge of the Sahara in winter and the marshy coastal plains in summer.

Emile-Félix Gautier spent his entire career at the University of Algiers. He was a geographer, but like many other French geographers at that time, he was also a historian. He was fascinated by the Roman ruins, which testified the development of typical Roman forms of agriculture in Tunisia, most of Algeria and northern Morocco. He had an equal interest in Moslem times; his most famous book covered the "Siècles obscurs de l'histoire du Maghreb" (*Gautier* 1937). In his interpretation he relied heavily on the ideas of *Ibn Khaldoun*, the great Arabic historian who lived in Tunisia in the 14th century. *Ibn Khaldoun* distinguished three main social groups competing for space and power in the Maghreb: the farmers of the coastal plains and mountainous areas; the nomads of the South or high plains, who moved to the North, often to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, in summertime; and the urban dwellers.

Nomadism did not play an important role in Roman times. Its success resulted from the domestication of the dromedary, which occurred during the first centuries of the Christian era. Thanks to the dromedary, the mobility of nomadic groups increased substantially. When riding their horses or dromedaries, they were efficient warriors.

The relation between shepherds and farmers was always difficult. In North Africa, the whole balance of power changed with the introduction of long-range nomadism, especially after the arrival of the Hilalian Bedouin tribes, in the 10th and 11th centuries. Most of the farmers of the plains had to accept the domination of the nomadic tribes. Tilled land was often transformed into rough pasture. As a result, the open landscapes of steppe extended to the north, often to the seashore. Nomads were, however, unable to conquer mountainous areas – partly because the feet of their dromedaries were hurt by rocky soils. They were also unable to dominate the coastal hills with their rich farming and city life.

In this way, *Emile-Félix Gautier* introduced a historical dimension into the Vidalian interpretation of Mediterranean rural landscapes. They do not only reflect the diversity of Mediterranean natural environments. They were the product of a history during which the boundaries between the different types of humanised landscapes expressed the relative strength of the groups as much as the character of the environment.

5.2 Jacques Ancel and the Balkans

Vidal de la Blache had mainly worked on the northern part of the Mediterranean, but was more familiar with Southern France, Italy and Greece than with the inner Balkans.

Jacques Ancel discovered this region when serving in the French Orient Army during World War I, based in Salonica, the troops of *Franchet d'Esperey* fought mainly in Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. After the war *Ancel* prepared a Ph.D. on Macedonia and travelled extensively all over the area (*Ancel* 1926, 1930).

In his interpretation of the Balkanic landscapes, *Ancel* relied both on *Jovan Cvijić*, the Serbian geographer, and *Vidal de la Blache*. The latter had been conscious of the role of the upper part of the inner basins in the history of the area; he noted, concerning Drama, on the old Roman *Via Egnatia* in Macedonia: "There, just like in Sérés, a rest of urban life, stuck to the mountain, is a sign of a latent power which only asks to prosper when the time will come" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1922: 91).

When reading *Cvijić*, the role of the contact zones between plains and mountains appeared central in the dynamics of settlement (*Cvijić* 1918): Mountains served as refuges; they allowed the development of transhumance; they were, however, generally too poor to accommodate centres of powerful political systems. The plains were rich when a long period of peace allowed the drainage of marshes – but with insecurity, they could only be exploited as winter pasture for the transhumance flocks coming from the mountains.

In-between, the piedmonts, *podgornie,* offered good soils, the possibility to rely on grain growing, the fruits of their orchards, cattle or sheep breeding. They offered good conditions for urban life – though on a restricted scale most of the time.

The Vidalian model of rural landscapes was perfectly effective when dealing with the coastal zones of the Balkans – there were rivieras in Dalmatia just like in Catalonia, Provence, Liguria or Greece. It had to be amended for the inner areas, where upper piedmonts played a central role. The introduction of *podgornie* transformed the interpretation since it stressed the role of power relations: Piedmonts drew a good part of their strength from the mountains above them, but could only prosper when controlling the plains.

5.3 Jacques Weulersse, Xavier de Planhol, the Middle East and Asia Minor

Vidal de la Blache used his model when describing the Middle East. Concerning rivieras, he wrote:

> "Maybe it is in Syria, along this stretch of seashore extending south of Tripoli to Mount Carmel, that its prototype had to be sought. There, from Byblos to Tyre, the line of Phoenician cities unfolds, breeding-ground of colonies which scattered on all the seashores" (*Vidal de la Blache* 1922: 86).

The rural landscapes of the Middle East had to be interpreted in the same way as those of North Africa: as the result of a permanent confrontation between nomads and farmers, with the same kind of mountain refuge on Mount Lebanon and in Kabylia. During the 1930s and early 1940s, *Jacques Weulersse* succeeded in this way to extend the Vidalian model to the whole area between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Sea (*Weulersse* 1946).

The only part of the Mediterranean world for which the model had still to be adapted was Asia Minor. Just as in North Africa or the Middle East, the whole history of the area consisted of successive waves of invasions and a permanent confrontation between nomads

and farmers. There was a major difference, however, between the nomadism of the Arabs and the nomadism practiced by the Turkish people: The latter was based on the Bactrian camel. The dromedary dislikes rocky soils, low temperatures and humidity. The Bactrian camel has no problem with hard surfaces and cold. In Asia Minor,

> "a decisive factor was certainly the facility with which the newcomers, with their Bactrian camels more or less crossbred with dromedaries, submerged the steppes of the high plateau and the mountains, where they found their summer pasture. Here they settled first, notably on the inner side of the Pontic Range, close to the mountain blocks which offered them summer pastures (*yayla*) with abundant running waters and provided them with the freshness that these nomads coming from cool steppes sought above all" (*Planhol* 1975).

As a result, in Asia Minor mountains did not play the role of refuge they had in the Middle East and North Africa. In order to escape the inroads of nomads, the only solution for the farmers was to settle the hyper-humid and densely forested slopes overlooking the Black Sea.

5.4 From a cyclic to a linear view of the history of Mediterranean rural landscapes and societies

In his analysis of the Mediterranean *Vidal de la Blache* did not ignore time; he chose his examples from antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well as from modern times. However, the dominating feeling provided by his analysis was one of permanency, with cyclical variations, rather than one of major changes occurring in the geographical setting of the area! Most of the features he described dated back to *Homer* and *Hesiod*!

His model, after it was completed by his followers during the first half of the 20th century, struck a different note. For them, the landscape units were not only based on natural features. They evolved as the expression of technical and organisational solutions to the problems of agriculture – hence the significance of the open field system. They resulted from the competition of different groups – farmers vs. nomads. The introduction of long-range nomadism appeared as the major event in this evolution – far more significant than the conversion to Islam in the southern and eastern half of the Mediterranean. Along these lines, the interpretation that *Pierre Birot* provided of the Mediterranean rural landscapes opposed the regions which were conquered and devastated to those which benefited from a long tradition of sedentary farming (*Birot and Dresch* 1953).

6. Braudel's Interpretation of the Vidalian Model

Braudel knew the results of the analysis of agrarian structures in the interpretation of Mediterranean rural landscapes, but preferred to resort to *Vidal*. In the first part of "La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II" (*Braudel* 1949), he distinguished: (i) the mountainous areas, with their reliance on transhumance to supplement their scarce farming resources; (ii) the hills and low plateaus, with farmers producing wheat and barley and a preference for arboriculture, winegrowing, olive and fig trees; the high piedmonts of the inner basins in the Balkans, with their *podgornie,* which offered another variety of this type of landscape; (iii) the low plains, with their marshy areas and the permanent threat of malaria, which resulted in alternating periods of prosperity and decline; (iv) the high plains, with their steppe landscape, their open field systems and the many problems stemming from the close coexistence of farmers and transhumants or nomads; (v) the *rivieras*, which added fish-

ing and coastal navigation to sophisticated forms of arboriculture; (vi) the islands, which shared with the low plains the feature of alternating periods, with phases of prosperity, when navigation was safe and not impeded by piracy, and long periods of isolation.

The first three categories and the fifth copied *Vidal's*. *Braudel* added two new categories: (iv) the open landscapes of high plateaus and (vi) the islands. The high plateaus, with their open field systems, clearly reflected recent research on agrarian structures.

Braudel was not a historian of rural life and landscape. He based his analysis of the Mediterranean on the categories of landscapes – rural landscapes – imagined by *Vidal de la Blache*, because they showed the reasons why agriculture and sheep- or cattle-breeding always involved, in the Mediterranean world, the development of a life of interrelation. *Rivieras* differed from the other hilly areas because of the opportunities their small ports offered to navigation and trade. The high plateaus were interesting not only because of the grain they produced and the flocks which pastured them; they also offered good conditions for mobility and trade. *Braudel* emphasises the carts and packmules which frequented their tracks and roads. Islands differed from other Mediterranean countries by the succession of periods of participation in sea-trade and periods of closure.

The main advantage of the Vidalian analysis of Mediterranean rural landscape was that it provided a view into the mechanisms of traditional Mediterranean societies. Vidalian time was mainly cyclical. Braudelian time was linear. In this way, geography became an essential part of his historical explanation. Through the dynamics of humanised environments, *Braudel* introduced *longue durée* into the writing of history.

Vidalian analysis of rural landscapes had another quality: It was open to aesthetic considerations. When analysing Italian landscapes in the 1930s, *Jules Sion* noted for instance:

> "Each region takes care of its planting according to its own method; and it does not appear that it derives directly from technical necessities or the natural environment. [...] In Tuscany and Umbria, each farm is proud of its few pines and cypresses, and the hills over the River Arno are lined with small cypresses, just like in a painting of the *quattrocento*. In spite of their inutility, the Tuscan wished to give, through them, an embellishment to his land and to almost compose the landscape in which he worked. This quest for beauty happens rather seldom; one has the feeling, nevertheless, to discover something like a local style, relatively free from nature, in this way of organising the works and aspects of these humanised rural areas, which reveal a bit of the soul of their people" (*Sorre* and *Sion* 1934: 247).

It may be wise for geographers to be sensitive to the quality of landscapes, just as *Vidal de la Blache* and his followers were a century ago.

7. Conclusion

For a long time, the Mediterranean was mainly conceived as a useful container for dealing with history or politics. It was only by the end of the 19th century that it became to be conceived as a fundamental unit: Post-impressionist painters then discovered the strength of its light, which revealed for them the true nature of things and beings.

The discovery of the fundamental unity of the Mediterranean by French geographers occurred at the same time. As shown by *Vidal de la Blache*, Mediterranean peoples always had to solve the same problem: How to cope with the long summer drought? Their *genres de vie* responded to this question and explained the

diversity of the Mediterranean humanised landscapes. French geographers developed the Vidalian interpretation of the Mediterranean over the span of two generations.

As conceived by *Vidal de la Blache*, the unity of the Mediterranean was rooted in nature and did not change with time. The reality described by his followers was different; the Mediterranean landscapes had a history. It meant that the idea of the Mediterranean as a fundamental geographical unit was also a historical construct. It appeared at a time when Western countries controlled all Mediterranean countries, and when Western civilisation began to doubt its Christian tradition and sought out a substitute in Greek and Roman paganism.

Note

[1] All translations from original works are by the author.

8. References

Ancel, J. 1926: Peuples et nations des Balkans. – Paris

Ancel, J. 1930: La Macédoine. Étude de colonisation contemporaine. – Paris

Aymard, M. 1985: Espaces. – In: *Braudel, F.* (ed.): La Méditerranée. – Vol. 1: L'espace et l'histoire. – 2nd ed. – Paris: 191-223

Birot, P. et *J. Dresch* 1953: La Méditerranée et le Moyen-Orient, Vol. 1: La Méditerranée occidentale. – Paris

Bloch, M. 1931: Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française. – Instituttet for sammenlignende Kulturforskning, Serie B **19**. – Oslo et al.

Braudel, F. 1949: La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II. – Paris

Braudel, F. (ed.) 1977: La Méditerranée. Vol. 1: L'espace et l'histoire. Vol. 2: Les hommes et l'héritage. – Paris

Braudel, F. 1989: Le modèle italien. – Paris

Braudel, F. 1996: Les écrits de Fernand Braudel. – Vol. 1: Autour de la Méditerranée. – Paris

Braudel, F. 1998: Les mémoires de la Méditerranée. – Paris

Brunhes, J. 1902: L'irrigation dans la péninsule ibérique et dans l'Afrique du Nord. – Paris

Cvijić, J., 1918: La péninsule balkanique. Géographie humaine. – Paris

Dion, R. 1934: Essai sur la formation du paysage rural français. – Tours

Faucher, D. 1927: Plaines et bassins du Rhône moyen entre Bas-Dauphiné et Provence. – Paris

Fischer, Th. 1879: Studien über das Klima der Mittelmeerländer. – Dr. A. Petermann's Mittheilungen aus Justus Perthes' Geographischer Anstalt **58**, Ergänzungsheft. – Gotha

Durant, E. et *C. Flahaut* 1886: Les limites de la région méditerranéenne. – Bulletin de la Société Botanique de France 33: 24-34

Gautier, E.-F. 1937: Le passé de l'Afrique du Nord. Les siècles obscurs. – Paris

George, P. 1935: La région du Bas-Rhône. – Paris

Le Lannou, M. 1942: Pâtres et paysans de Sardaigne. – Tours

Planhol, X. de 1957: Le monde islamique. Essai de géographie religieuse. – Paris

Planhol, X. de : 1958: De la plaine pamphylienne aux lacs pisidiens. Nomadisme et vie pastorale. – Paris

Planhol, X. de 1968: Les fondements géographiques de l'histoire de l'Islam. – Paris

Planhol, X. de 1975: La Turquie. – In: *Brunhes Delamare, M.J.*, *P. Deffontaines* et *A. Journaux* (eds.): Géographie régionale. Vol. 1. – Encyclopédie de la Pléiade **39**. – Paris: 124-162

Reclus, E. 1883: Nouvelle géographie universelle. Vol. 1: L'Europe méridionale. – Paris

Rewald, J. 1955: Histoire de l'impressionnisme. – Paris

Sorre, M. 1913: Les Pyrénées méditerranéennes. – Paris

Sorre, M. et *J. Sion* 1934: Méditerranée. Péninsules Méditerranéennes. – Géographie Universelle **7**. – Paris

Staszak, J.-F. (2003). Géographies de Gauguin. – Paris

Varii Auctores 1985: L'impressionnisme et le paysage français. – Paris

Varii Auctores 2000: Méditerranée. De Courbet à Matisse. – Paris

Vidal de la Blache, P. 1873: La péninsule européenne. L'Océan et la Méditerranée. Leçon d'ouverture au cours d'histoire et géographie de la faculté des lettres de Nancy. – Nancy, Paris

Vidal de la Blache, P. 1886: Des rapports entre les populations européennes et le climat sur les bords européens de la Méditerranée. – Revue de Géographie **10**: 401-419

Vidal de la Blache, P. 1889: Etats et nations d'Europe. Autour de la France. – Paris

Vidal de la Blache, P. 1903: Tableau de la géographie de la France. – Paris

Vidal de la Blache, P. 1918: Les grandes agglomérations humaines. Régions méditerranéennes. – Annales de géographie **27**: 174-187

Vidal de la Blache, P. 1922: Principes de géographie humaine. – Paris

Weulersse, J. 1946: Les paysans du Moyen-Orient. – Paris

Summary: About Rural Landscapes: The Invention of the Mediterranean and the French School of Geography

As a specific category of aesthetic experience, the Mediterranean was invented at the time of impressionism and post-impressionism. In this period, *Vidal de la Blache* and his followers developed a geographical analysis of the Mediterranean landscapes – mainly the rural ones – based on the summer drought and the landforms and *genres de vie* that are associated with it. Later, *Emile-Félix Gautier*, *Georges Ancel*, *Jacques Weulersse* and *Xavier de Planhol* applied the notions developed by *Vidal de la Blache* for the northern shores of the Mediterranean to its southern and eastern parts. In the interwar period, French geographers discovered that the categories conceived by Roman agronomists were still useful for understanding Mediterranean landscapes. *Cato*, *Varro* or *Columella* distinguished a trilogy of land uses, *ager*, *saltus* and *silva*. The *ager* itself was characterised by the Mediterranean triad of cultures, wheat (or barley), vine and olive trees. The discovery of agrarian structures in the rural landscapes allowed a systematisation of these results; within less than twenty years, the understanding of traditional landscapes in the Mediterranean world gained much in depth. *Braudel's* conception of the Mediterranean was rooted in the landscape categories invented by *Vidal de la Blache* half a century earlier. Each of these landscape units was characterised by its own temporality, with long apparent periods of stability and phases of rapid change. It was through his analysis of the Mediterranean landscapes at the time of *Philip II* that *Braudel* introduced the notion of *longue durée*.

Zusammenfassung: Über ländliche Landschaften: Die Erfindung des Mittelmeerraumes und die französische Geographie

Der Mittelmeerraum als spezifische Kategorie ästhetischer Erfahrung ist eine Erfindung der Zeit des Impressionismus und Post-Impressionismus. Zur gleichen Zeit entwickelten *Vidal de la Blache* und seine Schüler eine geographische Analyse der mediterranen Landschaften – besonders der des ländlichen Raumes –, die auf dem Einfluss der Sommertrockenheit und den mit ihr verbundenen Oberflächenformen und Lebensweisen basiert. Später übertrugen *Emile-Félix Gautier*, *Georges Ancel*, *Jacques Weulersse* und *Xavier de Planhol* die von *Vidal de la Blache* für die nördlichen Küsten des Mittelmeeres entwickelten Konzepte auf die südlichen und östlichen Küsten. Zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen entdeckten französische Geographen, dass die von römischen Agronomen entwickelten Kategorien immer noch nützlich für das Verständnis der mediterranen Landschaften sind. *Cato*, *Varro* und *Columella* verwendeten eine Trilogie der Landnutzung: *ager*, *saltus* und *silva*. Der *ager* wiederum ist durch die mediterrane Trias der Kulturen charakterisiert: Weizen (oder Gerste), Reben und Olivenbäume. Die Aufdeckung der agrarischen Strukturen im ländlichen Raum erlaubte eine Systematisierung dieser Ergebnisse. Innerhalb von weniger als zwanzig Jahren gewann das Verständnis der traditionellen Landschaften in der mediter-