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Interconnected Histories and Construction of Collective Memory: Theoretical Approaches to the Perception of the Mediterranean Sea as a Palimpsestic *nœud de mémoire* in French and Italian Literature

Abstract: This paper aims to examine the Mediterranean Sea in the context of memory studies and to discuss its function as a transnational *lieu de mémoire* in French and Italian literature. In the case of the Mediterranean Sea the national perspective of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* has to be enlarged on a supranational scale. Indeed, the Mediterranean Sea can be considered as a privileged object of investigation to raise the question about interconnected pasts and memory conflict. For this purpose, we will take into consideration the theoretical model of *nœud de mémoire*, or memory knot, developed by Michael Rothberg, that imposes the vision of the Mediterranean Sea as a rhizomatic network of knotted memory. The treatment of *lieu de mémoire* in a Mediterranean context involves a pluridimensional interaction of diverse pasts and states that memory has to be explored somewhere in between of national and cultural cohesion, crossing and dispersion. These theoretical reflections will be supported by references and examples from French and Italian literary texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which Carthage is coded and recoded as one of those Mediterranean memory knots.

1 The Concept of *lieu de mémoire* in the Mediterranean Context

Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* conceptualizes "the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (Nora 1989, 7). In this context, the present paper aims to examine the Mediterranean Sea as a zone of entangled and superposed memories in French and Italian literature. Nora's study limits the notion of *lieu de mémoire* to national historiography; the study has, for instance, been widely criticized for neglecting the conflict-ridden imperial and colonial aspects of French history (Anderson 2009, 161–162). Further, Nora's oeuvre does not treat the Mediterranean Sea as a site of memory: the third volume,

Les France, incorporates a singular record of “Le front de mer” (Mollat du Jourdin 1997, 2721–2764) in the section titled “Conflits et partages – partages de l’espace-temps”. This entry attends to the two French coasts, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, to investigate the maritime identity of the French nation. The discussion of the overlapping or interconnected histories and memories within and beyond French and Francophone cultures is ignored despite the suggested heterogeneity of the collective identity in *Les Frances*.

The historian Maryline Crivello recently developed the approach of applying the concept of *lieu de mémoire* to the Mediterranean (Crivello 2010; 2017). She regards the Mediterranean as a preferred object of investigation through which interconnected pasts and memory conflicts can be examined on a supranational scale:

Les acquis de la recherche [...] s'exercent de manière privilégiée dans le cadre méditerranéen, qui est à la fois espace d'identification et espace d'affrontements de 'mémoires' ou d'identités narratives multiples. L'instrumentalisation du passé à des fins politiques n'est donc pas une spécificité méditerranéenne, mais elle a pris dans cet espace aux identités fragiles une coloration particulièrement vive. (Crivello 2010, 14)

The collective identification with the Mediterranean as a territorial and historical entity is described as a crossing of multiple narrative identities. Her envisioning of a more dynamic conception of the continuous overlapping of pasts is articulated through the notion of “anti-lieux de mémoire” (Crivello 2010, 19). Indeed, memory is no longer crystallized in or embodied by the Mediterranean once and for all; rather, a constant process of inscription and reinscription is provoked by diverse memories that remain in contact or even clash. The conception of an “anti-lieux de mémoire” describes the palimpsestic nature of the superposing pasts encompassed in the Mediterranean; namely,

une fabrication de ces ‘lieux mémoire’ [...] qui donne à voir des phénomènes de déplacement, de superposition, voire d'hybridation, qui résultent de la confrontation des regards et des usages. Ainsi certains lieux palimpsestes, multifonctionnels et polysémiques, dessinent une Méditerranée du partage, syncrétique et hybride, mais aussi hétérogène, intolérante et conflictuelle. (Crivello 2010, 20)

This characterization of a palimpsestic site of memory bears intimate resemblance to Michael Rothberg’s theoretical conception of “knots of memory” (Rothberg 2010, 3). Rothberg’s theory denotes an endeavor in the domain of memory studies to overcome Nora’s omission of pluralized memory, as well as to create a transition from national to trans- or supra-national sites of memory. Rothberg recalls (Rothberg 2010, 7) that Nora himself used the word ‘knot’ as a loose translation of the French ‘lieu’, which is also understood in German as ‘*Knoten*’ (Nora 2001, 685).

However, Rothberg's theoretical conception of memory knots, the *nœuds de mémoire*, intends "to explore the 'knotted intersections' of history and memory that cut across categories of national and ethnic identity" (Rothberg 2010, 8).

Contrary to the more static image of the *lieu de mémoire*, the idea of the knotted nature of collective memory implies the intersection of diverse pasts, agents and catalysts of memory (Rothberg 2010, 9). In Rothberg's words, "[s]uch agency entails recognizing and revealing the production of memory as an ongoing process involving inscription and reinscription, coding and recoding." (Rothberg 2010, 8–9) The notion of memory knots represents the rhizomatic vision of a palimpsest-like memory, a concept that appears to be a promising point of discussion in the context of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean can thus be conceived and perceived as a rhizomatic network of knotted memory. To summarize, applying the concept of *lieu de mémoire* in the context of the Mediterranean involves the pluri-dimensional interaction of diverse pasts. Applying the concept in this way implies that memory must be explored in the spaces between national and cultural cohesion, crossing and dispersion.

2 The Function of Literature in Constructing the Mediterranean into a Sea of Memory

"La mémoire est un récit, et tout récit est une création. La mémoire, tout comme l'histoire, est le récit que nous produisons sur notre passé tant individuel que collectif" (Polycandrioti 2010, 183). The creation of an individual or collective memory narrative is based predominantly on the process of textualization. Crivello emphasizes the importance of the literary field in constructing a collective Mediterranean identity without offering details: "Le 'récit méditerranéen' dans ce contexte se repère dans la construction d'un espace méditerranéen dont les principaux acteurs se trouvent dans le champ littéraire [...]." (Crivello 2010, 18) The conception of a Mediterranean identity is grounded in a geographic, geo-cultural and often a geo-strategic mapping of the Mediterranean basin, which is conceived as an ever-changing spatiotemporal constellation. Literature has a crucial function in the creation of a Mediterranean chronotope whose specific narrative configuration reflects the geopolitical aspirations of nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Colonialism and imperialism act as engines for such nationally determined interpretations of the Mediterranean Sea. This circumstance is particularly depicted in literary texts that reflect the official memory politics of a country and perform the function of *legitimation* in terms of Aleida Assmann's typology of memory functions (Assmann 2009, 133). Assmann distinguishes functional memory

from storage memory; functional memory activates a selective process of keeping alive past events to promote a sense of cultural and national identity, whereas storage memory retains an amorphous mass of information. Further, three distinct functions are identified: the above cited process of *legitimation* that is mostly related to official memory, its *de-legitimation*, and the process of *distinction* as the symbolic shaping of a collective identity through memory. The production of literary texts consolidating the official memory of a nationally and culturally determined past achieves a creative peak with respect to the Mediterranean Sea in the context of the imperial and colonial expansion of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. A time lag is nevertheless observed between French and Italian literary productions relating to the invention of a sea of memory.

The construction of this narrative occurred in France in tandem with scientific expeditions to Egypt (1798–1801), the Morea (1829–1831) and Algeria (1839–1842). Bourget indicated the significance of these voyages for the geo-historical appropriation of the Mediterranean Sea as a common cultural heritage:

Ni la géographie, ni l'histoire naturelle, ni l'anthropologie ne suffisent à donner à l'invention de la Méditerranée ses points d'appui: définir un espace ou une communauté d'appartenance suppose encore un horizon temporel, historique. Dans la définition d'une aire méditerranéenne, l'histoire aussi est en jeu: par elle passe la recherche des éléments d'un passé commun qui, contre la réalité d'un présent fait de contrastes, d'oppositions ou de conflits, puisse servir à des fins unificatrices et fonder le projet d'une destinée partagée. L'archéologie fournit ici une base essentielle. Le relevé des sites en Égypte et en Grèce, l'inventaire des monuments en Algérie, les premières fouilles effectués lors des missions rendent possible l'élaboration d'un passé régional commun, à l'échelle de la Méditerranée. (Bourget 1998, 24)

These expeditions stimulated the formation of a scientific dispositive on the Mediterranean Sea and also triggered its literary representations. Saminadayar-Perrin emphasized the 'literary invention' of the Mediterranean Sea as an event that paralleled this 'scientific invention' (Saminadayar-Perrin 2012, 9–10). Chateaubriand's 1811 *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* marks the initiation of this literary development and is structured as a circum-Mediterranean route skirting the remains of numerous ancient civilizations. This text presents itself as a journey signifying the individual and collective return to one's roots: "du 'miracle grec' au tombeau du Christ, de la patrie des Muses au Saint-Sépulcre, le pèlerin refonde son identité en retrouvant la double origine, culturelle et spirituelle, de la liberté française." (Saminadayar-Perrin 2012, 11–12) Chateaubriand's itinerary may be considered a textual archetype for the construction of the Mediterranean Sea as a *lieu de mémoire* in French literature and remains a point of reference for subsequent colonial travel writing surrounding the Mediterranean.

A dispositive of literary texts highlighting the national and cultural heritage of Italy's own maritime past as represented by the Mediterranean Sea began to accrue in Italy only after the nation's unification in the late nineteenth century. The awakening of Italy's Mediterranean identity is strongly interconnected with the nation's entry into the age of colonial expansion. However, unlike France, Italy's colonial politics were marked by missed aspirations in Tunisia and Adua, failures the young nation-state intended to overcome through its military intervention in Libya:

Cancellata dal protettorato francese del 1881 l'aspirazione di Roma alla Tunisia, si può dire che la conquista della Tripolitania era rimasta, o diventata, l'obiettivo ricorrente della politica estera italiana sulla costa africana del Mediterraneo. Ve ne erano varie ragioni. In primo luogo perché gli altri territori di quella costa erano ormai già in mano ad altre potenze. In secondo luogo non tanto perché – in termini di risorse naturali o di spazi per la colonizzazione demografica – essa fosse particolarmente appetibile, ma piuttosto perché si riteneva che il controllo italiano della Tripolitania avrebbe perfezionato la posizione navale e strategica dell'Italia navale nel Mediterraneo centrale. (Labanca 2002, 109)

Italy's colonial disillusionment remains a cenotaph for its ensuing colonial pursuits in Tripolitania. The Italian-Turkish War for Libya in 1911/12 was diplomatically and militarily well-planned; it was also astutely thought-out in terms of propaganda, and a complete literary production was unleashed for promoting expansive politics pertaining to the Mediterranean Sea (Tamburini 2005, 44). Organizations such as the *Lega Navale Italiana* founded in 1899 or the *Istituto Coloniale Italiano* founded in 1906 published various texts about Italy's maritime past to trigger the Mediterranean consciousness of the nation. Alongside these official institutions, independent Italian writers also supported the invention of a maritime tradition to legitimize Italy's colonial claims in North Africa. Foremost among them were Gabriele D'Annunzio, Enrico Corradini and others representing the heterogenous conservative nationalist camp.

In summary, discrete events of a 'glorious' maritime past were selected and activated in the functional memories of both nations through the construction of memory narratives that were pivotal to the formulation of a collective Mediterranean consciousness. The two national memory narratives became subsequently entangled due to the colonial scramble that occurred in North Africa. This interweaving is especially evident in the diplomatic dispute regarding the colonial possession of Tunisia. Carthage becomes an example of the conversion of the Mediterranean into a zone of interconnected memories as both nations instrumentalized different episodes of their history in their literature to legitimize their colonial forays into North Africa.

3 Carthage as a ‘Knotted Intersection’ of History and Memory in Italy and France

Referencing Rothberg, Carthage can be labelled a ‘knotted intersection’ of history and memory at the time of colonial expansion along the Mediterranean. Carthage became an important crossover point for French and Italian literature at two key junctures of history: first, the Italian disillusionment with respect to its colonial possession of Tunisia after 1881 and its subsequent colonial aspirations towards Tripolitania and the Cyrenaica; second, the French reaction to fascist Mediterranean politics in Tunisia and beyond in the 1930s. Choate explains convincingly that the “[o]ngoing competition for influence in Tunisia goes to the heart of Italy’s contested role within the Mediterranean world.” (Choate 2010, 2) The sections that follow will demonstrate that this circumstance of a nodal political nature finds literary expression in three tendencies: first, the literary and cultural construction of a foundation myth for French colonialism in Carthage; second, the invention in Italian literature of a maritime tradition and identity based on the Punic Wars; and third, the recoding of Punic Carthage by French authors, in the vicinity of the so-called *École d’Alger*, as a symbol of an authentic Mediterranean spirit relating to a reminiscence of a Mediterranean under Carthaginian influence. The ensuing analysis of a selection of travel journals will demonstrate these inclinations.

3.1 Carthage as a Destination for French Crusaders

The French empire had already annexed the North African territory from the point of view of memory politics much before the French protectorate became a reality in Tunisia. The ruins of Carthage had been transmogrified into an object of national projection in French literature since Chateaubriand’s circum-Mediterranean *Itinéraire*. Carthage figured in Chateaubriand’s itinerary as a significant station along the Mediterranean Sea and is cited in his preface from 1826 and in the concluding segment of the travel journal. This section outlines the road map of the journey undertaken:

Je fis le tour de la Méditerranée sans accidents graves, retrouvant Sparte, passant à Athènes, saluant Jérusalem, admirant Alexandrie, signalant Carthage, et me reposant du spectacle de tant de ruines dans les ruines de l’Alhambra. J’ai donc eu le très petit mérite d’ouvrir la carrière, et le très grand plaisir de voir qu’elle a été suivie après moi. En effet mon Itinéraire fut à peine publié, qu’il servit de guide à une foule de voyageurs. Rien ne le recommande au public que son exactitude; c’est le livre de postes des ruines: j’y marque scrupuleusement les chemins, les habitacles et les stations de la gloire. (Chateaubriand 2005, 68–69)

His *Itinéraire* traced the routes of glory incarnated in the ruins of past civilizations; its references to Carthage comprise the feature that distinguished it from other contemporary travel narratives. This key differentiator is announced in the above citation by the verb ‘signalant’ and is also emphasized in the last chapter of the book, “Tunis et retour en France”, which is dedicated to the ruins of Carthage: “On peut donc dire que le sujet que je vais traiter est neuf. J’ouvrirai la route; les habiles viendront après moi” (Chateaubriand 2005, 492) His description of Carthage includes references to key historic moments: from the foundation of the ancient city, to the Punic Wars, to the death of Saint Louis during the crusades. Chateaubriand annunciated in a quasi-prophetic vision that the last episode would be particularly momentous for the further national inscription of the site:

On approchait du carnaval, et l’on ne songeait qu’à rire, en dépit des Maures. Les cendres de Didon et les ruines de Carthage entendaient le violon français. On ne s’embarrassait ni de Scipion, ni d’Annibal, ni de Marius, ni de Caton d’Utique [...]. Saint Louis seul eût été respecté en sa qualité de Français. (Chateaubriand 2005, 489)

In fact, a scientific and archaeological exploration of the ancient Punic city was initiated after the French conquest of Algeria. The ruins were gradually transformed into a French colonial site of memory (Moumni 2018, 147), which served as a reminder of the Christian past of French crusades in North Africa through the newly constructed chapel (1841) and cathedral (1890) for Saint Louis. The French guidebook to Algeria and Tunisia may be cited as an example: it was published, inter alia, by Stéphane Gsell (1864–1932), the French archaeologist and specialist in ancient Africa. Carthage is semantized in this volume as a connecting point between the Oriental and the Occidental Mediterranean and is described as ‘couronnée par la cathédrale de Saint Louis’ (Jacqueton et al. 1903, 344), which ‘dominates’ the Mediterranean Sea from its location at the top of the hill of Byrsa. Chateaubriand’s description of Carthage and his historical references to Saint Louis, in whose footsteps he followed in his itinerary, exert a significant impact on subsequent Mediterranean travel reports and consolidate the idea of a French sphere of influence across the Mediterranean. For example, Louis Bertrand’s 1923 itinerary *à rebours*, entitled *Le Livre de la Méditerranée*, epitomizes such an intellectual affiliation by tracing a circum-Mediterranean route that reverses Chateaubriand’s itinerary. Chateaubriand is remembered in this travel book as the traveler surveys the sea from the hill of Byrsa and establishes a national gallery of pilgrim-conquerors:

La Carthage punique, la Carthage romaine, les figures historiques et légendaires de tant de généraux, de poètes, d’orateurs, d’évêques ou d’apôtres, – tout cela défile instantanément dans la pensée qui déborde. Mais surtout pour une âme française, quel lieu exaltant que

celui-ci! Ceux de chez nous ont véritablement conquis cette colline. Pèlerins de l'art, ou pèlerins de la foi, ils l'ont marquée à l'empreinte de la patrie, depuis saint Louis qui vint y mourir sous le cilice et la cendre de la pénitence jusqu'à Chateaubriand qui, dans cette métropole de l'église africaine, poursuivait encore les vestiges de ses *Martyrs* jusqu'à Flaubert enfin qui conçut, à cette même place, son roman de *Salammô!* (Bertrand 1923, 113–114)

3.2 The Punic Wars in Italian Literature

Conversely, the claims laid to Tunisia by the young Italian nation-state were more socio-economic in character, since Tunisia denoted a locale of political exile and an immigration destination during and after the *Risorgimento* (Choate 2010, 2). Tunisia became a manifestation of national dispersion since the second half of the nineteenth century, likely as a result of an absence of consolidating memory narratives. However, a full narrative mythification of Mediterranean traditions did emerge relating to the Punic Wars in Italian literature and film at the beginning of the twentieth century, encompassing Italy's colonial failure in Tunisia in diplomatic terms, and the subsequent battle for Tripolitania. In this context, the Roman past of the Mediterranean Sea was reflected more and more through the idea of an imperial *mare nostrum* and became increasingly significant as a historical allusion to the awakening of the Mediterranean identity in Italy. Bertellini states,

[t]he articulation of such mythologizing narratives achieved three goals in terms of public opinion. The first was the designation of the territories of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania with the older Roman term of 'Libya' (which had comprised sections of the Tunisian coast, including the old Carthage, and Egyptian desert). The second was the ensuing functionalization of Libya as a redemptive site against past colonial defeats, drawing upon timeless Virgilian dreams of rebirth. The third goal was a bipartisan association of nationalist sentiment with the immigration phenomenon [...]. (Bertellini 2016, 133)

The second and third objectives asserted in the text quoted above were particularly evidenced in Italian travel reports published at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, Giacomo De Martino's 1907 travel journal *Tripoli, Cirene e Cartagine* was written for the newly founded colonial institution *Istituto Coloniale Italiano*. Similarly, Gualtiero Castellini's¹ 1911 travel journal *Tunisi e Tripoli* was written for the *Lega navale italiana*. Both these North African itineraries were commissioned works that conformed to the prevailing political circumstances and aspirations pertaining to the Mediterranean and thus reflected political inten-

¹ Gualtiero Castellini was the secretary of the nationalist party *Associazione Nazionale Italiana*, which was founded by Enrico Corradini. (Choate 2010, 11).

tions to instrumentalize the past as official memory. De Martino's journal achieved this goal through its final chapter "Cartagine – la disillusa del Mediterraneo", which incorporated a fictionally recreated dialogue between the traveler and Lord X, an English expert of contemporary history or "esperto nelle ricerche storiche del suo tempo" (De Martino 1912 [1907], 195). The English dialogue partner Lord X voices all the critique of France, explaining the presence of Saint Louis' devotional church in Carthage to the puzzled Italian narrator. He alludes to a purportedly memorable conflict between France and Italy to explain the rationale behind the erection of this Christian monument:

Ogni cosa dà occasione a meditare – replica Lord X. – I francesi, credetelo, hanno bisogno di dar sempre una forma esteriore e solenne, direi teatrale, alle loro cose. Leggete i loro libri più recenti sulla Tunisia: trasparendo dovunque una profonda uggia contro di voi italiani che, prima di essi, avete avuto il torto imperdonabile di creare una vita a Tunisi; non si sanno proprio assuefare all'idea che in una terra ormai francese, la popolazione debba pur rimanere principalmente italiana. E così si sono lambiccati il cervello per trovare un diritto storico, più antico del vostro, che legittimasse il predominio sopra di voi. (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197)

The French instrumentalization of a Christian past for Carthage is designated as a heraldic genealogy or "genealogia araldica" in the continuing dialogue (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197), which describes the French occupation of Carthage as a phenomenon that withstood the 'real' Roman tradition of the site where the Italian narrator discovers his roots:

L'Africa – disse Lord X – è tutta una contraddizione. Andate a Cirene. Della ricca ed opulenta città che cosa trovate? Un beduino a cavallo in una landa deserta. [...] E del nome italiano in Tripolitania, strombazzato da anni? Le alte torri del telegrafo aereo tedesco. E della Tunisia francese? Una popolazione italiana.' Ridendo chiusi il dialogo: 'e della Cartagine di Amilcare, Annibale e Scipione? Il convento e la chiesa del focoso cardinale Lavigerie! (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197)

This conversation reinscribes the Punic Wars in a setting that the Italian traveler considers one of "questi luoghi fatti sacri da tante memorie" (De Martino 1912 [1907], 197). The Roman ruins of Carthage incarnate the traces of the past conflict between Rome and Carthage over the domination of the Mediterranean. Their similarity with Roman ruins in Italy also promotes their interpretation of being a geographical prolongation of Italy's territory.

By recoding Carthage in the full dialogue in terms of its Roman past in the Mediterranean, De Martino censures France's 'illegitimate' possession of Tunisia and simultaneously envisions Italy's redemption in Tripolitania, where Roman maritime glory could be resurrected. His argumentation transposes the identification of the Roman victory over Carthage from one center of conflict to another po-

tential nucleus. The Punic Wars shift from a geographically sited memory figure to a leading thought pattern of Italy's Mediterranean identity.

A comparable argumentation, albeit more anti-French in tone, is expressed in Castellini's travel journal, which designates Tunisia as an 'African Sicily'. Tunisia is identified as an irredentist region of the Mediterranean and positioned beside Trento, Trieste and Tripoli (Castellini 1911, VII). In this context, the historical reference to the Punic Wars is not the only allusion intended to promote Italy's awareness of its national Mediterranean tradition; this suggestion is complemented by the vision of a *risorgimental* sea, "il mare dei mille" (Castellini 1911, 10), a term that here describes the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Adriatic Sea would thus be liberated from Austrian domination, and the Tyrrhenian Sea would be freed from French hegemony. This "irredentismo anti-francese" (Castellini 1911, 151) emanated from the supposed demographic imbalance between the French protectors and Italian emigrants who evolved into an irredentist force of power – "da emigrati ci trasformiamo in irredenti." (Castellini 1911, 151)

In brief, these travel journals demonstrate that both travelers attempted to coin a heraldic genealogy of Italy's Mediterranean identity vis-à-vis the Roman maritime power struggle with Carthage. They described Carthage as a palimpsestic site coded and recoded by different memory narratives; they also simultaneously transformed Carthage into a thought pattern representing Italy's Mediterranean roots by referencing the Punic Wars, especially in the context of the Italian-Turkish War. In fact, the theme of the Punic Wars flourished in Italian literary and cinematographic production at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was even expanded upon during the fascist rule when the concept of *mare nostrum* became an important value for Mussolini's propagandist cult of the *romanità*.

3.3 Carthage as the Symbol of an Authentic Mediterranean Spirit

French author Gabriel Audisio opposed this nationalist and fascist vision of Roman Mediterranean heritage and transformed Carthage into an anti-Roman site of counter-memory. This transmutation is demonstrated in his 1936 travel journal, *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée II. Le sel de la mer*. This travel journal is dedicated entirely to Tunisia and can also be classified as an example of Étienne Maignan's definition of the "nouveau genre de l'essai méditerranéen" (Maignan 2018, 140). It bears witness to the refined regeneration of French-Italian political antagonism in Tunisia after the rise of fascism in Italy, which was also a subject of analysis by Bessis in her detailed historical study (Bessis 1986). Audisio's Mediterranean essay presents itself as a memorial narrative: "l'auteur a trouvé la Tunisie baignée

par les eaux du souvenir où il a re-pêché tous ses poissons, subrepticement.” (Audisio 1936, s.p.). Audisio implicitly compares the Mediterranean to a sea of memory, in which the author ‘fishes’ for symbolic recollections. However, the literary genre of the essay and the author’s self-identification with a fisherman both indicate a distance from heroic and monumental memory narratives such as epic novels or films. The first part of the essay entitled “Le sel” is particularly important in the rewriting of Carthage. Audisio’s reasoning advances in three stages: the deconstruction of Roman ruins in Gabès, the reconstruction of Carthage as an anti-Roman site of counter-memory, and a historical contextualization of the theme within the political debate of his time. Audisio claims Tunis and the ancient site of Carthage as the focal point of the Mediterranean from a symbolic as well as a geographical standpoint:

La Méditerranée contemporaine reste semblable à l’univers des Anciens, car leur univers c’était justement la Méditerranée: un cercle. Tous les points font également face au centre, tout y est ramené par une espèce de dynamisme centripète. Et précisément le centre [...], le cœur, la clef de l’équilibre est tout près de Tunis. (Audisio 1936, 57)

In a sense, the centrality of Tunis emanates from its positioning: Tunis (and Tunisia) is a Mediterranean melting pot that straddles Oriental and Occidental spheres of influence. Conversely, Tunis is also pivotal due to its relation to the ancient civilization of Carthage, which, for Audisio, symbolizes marine genius: “le sel de Carthage, le sel du génie marin qui fit scintiller Carthage au soleil de la Méditerranée” (Audisio 1936, 70–71). An entire dichotomous system is created between Rome and Carthage, denying Rome a maritime character: “C’est par son armée de fantassins que Rome s’impose au monde. Quelques victoires navales n’y changent rien. La marine fut étrangère à Rome, Rome fut étrangère à l’esprit maritime: c’est Carthage, c’est Athènes qui étaient dans le génie de la Méditerranée.” (Audisio 1936, 103)

This citation reveals the essay’s intention to deconstruct the nationalist and fascist rhetoric that emphasized Roman authority over the sea by recalling critical naval battles fought during the Punic Wars. The decentralization of Rome in the Mediterranean in Audisio’s text correlates with the recentralization of Carthage in the Mediterranean. However, Audisio’s argumentation is not grounded in a new cult that views the Punic ruins as a reflection of Roman myth creation. Rather, Carthage is intended to represent a timeless refiguration of the Mediterranean spirit incarnated in various sites, cities and places across the expanse of the Mediterranean Sea: “La Carthage que je dis, ce n’est pas là où elle fut que j’irai la chercher, comme font presque tous les voyageurs. [...] Carthage est partout où je la promène, partout où je la découvre.” (Audisio 1936, 72) Audisio thus recreated Carthage as a

site of counter-memory, pitting this conceptualization against the propagated Roman monoculturalization of the Mediterranean past and identity. His text served as a statement against the political circumstances that prevailed in Italy. Audisio thus endeavored to liberate Italy's Mediterranean identity from the distorted fascist interpretation by reconciling it with the Etruscan civilization of ancient Italy that was colonized by Rome: "Pas plus que Rome n'est la Méditerranée, elle n'est l'Italie. *Pas même* l'Italie. Laisser croire que Rome et l'Italie c'est la même chose, comme font les 'latins', encore une confusion qu'on ne dénoncera jamais assez." (Audisio 1936, 105) Carthage once again assumed the characteristic of an emblem through Audisio's contentions, symbolizing what he denominated in 1935 as "race bleue" (Audisio 2009 [1935], 22) in his first collection of essays *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée*. It could also be labelled 'blue memory' with reference to the Algerian author Waciny Larej (Larey 1999, 243) as a transcultural conception of the Mediterranean identity, even though at that time, Audisio had not yet overcome colonial patterns of thinking.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, Italian and French travel literature published at the beginning of the twentieth century evidenced an on-going process of the inscription and reinscription of Carthage. This ancient site was conceptualized as a setting that continually interconnected histories and memories to define and redefine a collective Mediterranean identity. Such encounters of multiple narratives evince that conceptions of Carthage oscillate between national, transnational and transcultural projections of identity. Carthage may be defined in terms of Bertrand Westphal's geocritical approach to the Mediterranean Sea as a "feuilleté temporal" (Westphal 2001, 8), that displays discrete historical stratifications and literary superscriptions, a palimpsestic *œud de mémoire* that redefines the literary cartography of the Mediterranean identity.

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