

Wheat, vines, and olive trees: transformations in the practice and representations of a Mediterranean triad

Mutations en Méditerranée (MeM)
Call for papers for issue 2 | 2024



Souvenir trinket, lucky hanging charm made of straw and ears of wheat, near Belgrade, Serbia. Became part of collections in 1962. © Virginie Louis MNHN / photo Mucem / Virginie Louis

Mutations en Méditerranée (MeM) is a multidisciplinary digital journal founded by PhD students of the Institut Sociétés en Mutation en Méditerranée (SoMuM) of Aix-Marseille Université. It aims to open a publication space for young researchers. The journal publishes one online issue a year, with open access, and welcomes articles in French and English.

Imagine Herodotus travelling around the Mediterranean today, more than 2400 years after his voyages. Would he be surprised to see citrus fruits dotting the horizon? Would he be astonished to be served tomatoes? In 1940, Lucien Febvre retraced the evolution of Mediterranean agriculture from this multi-secular perspective. At the time, he may have been dreaming of an ancient Mediterranean world made up of nothing but wheat, vines and olive trees, even though it was already a hub of global agricultural trade. By sharing “the same granaries, the same cellars, the same oil mills” (Braudel 1966, p. 229), the Mediterranean has witnessed the evolution of this agricultural and alimentary triad and how it is depicted, alongside the transformation of related practices. The dialectical relationship between the practices and depictions of this triad changed as a result of the climatic, demographic, political and technical upheavals that have marked and continue to transform this area. Wheat, vines and olive trees are thus seen as the first step in the study of transformations of social practices and representations in the Mediterranean, at different spatial and temporal scales of analysis.

This call for papers seeks to develop reflections on this Mediterranean triad, focusing on three dimensions: the land and the relationship with the land, from a productive, dietary and demographic point of view; the appropriation and dispossession of land; artistic practices as well as historically documented representations and imaginary constructions. These dimensions should demonstrate both the unification and the fragmentation of Mediterranean areas. This call for contributions is open to proposals from PhD students from all disciplines; multidisciplinary contributions will be particularly welcome.

Axis 1. Land and relationships with land: production, food and populations

Agricultural areas develop in multiple ways, balancing food and industrial production and tourism by adapting to very different spatio-temporal contexts.

From the field to the plate

Our land is intricately linked to our tables, just as our plates interact with our fields. The geographer Jean Bruhnes once said that to eat is to incorporate a territory (Fumey 2007). But what would happen if, in several decades' time, we only ate products from laboratories? What would our planet look like if we all adopted the 'chewing gum meal' imagined by Roald Dahl in his 1964 novel 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'?

The environmental changes currently shaking up our agricultural systems incite us to question our consumption patterns (García-Martín *et al.* 2021). The Mediterranean diet, conceptualised in the 1950s by Ancel Keys and awarded heritage status by UNESCO in 2010, is evidence of a table to which climate change was not invited, and prompts us to question the systems in place. How do farming systems, aided by technological progress, reconcile this fixed conceptualisation and identity of the Mediterranean diet with the upheavals caused by climate change? Is this agricultural, cultural and identity-based heritage still in place, or are new avenues being explored, even if they overturn this dietary identity? What impact will this have on areas, regions and landscapes?

These changes are accompanied by cultural and ethical transformations that modify our consumption patterns and, in turn, farming systems and the environment (Didelon 2009). The standardisation of consumption patterns brought about by globalisation, the growing interest in so-called 'terroir' products (PDO/AOC) and the replacement of animal proteins by plant proteins, are currently reinventing the configuration of our agricultural areas (Pitte 2001). This theme therefore proposes to examine the expressions and consequences of these changes on territories and landscapes.

Renewal of territories and their functions

Ecological, economic and social issues, such as the decline in family farming (Bergeret 2016) and the exodus of young rural dwellers (Castagnone and Termine 2018), are forcing agricultural areas as a whole to adapt or even convert. Young people or neo-ruralists are currently working these lands with new ideas, at times causing conflict with previous generations. What alternatives are they putting forward for transforming agricultural areas and farming systems? How do local people participate, and how do these different populations live together?

The promotion of the benefits of the Mediterranean diet has led to accelerated production and new by-products, such as grape seeds used to treat hypertension (Boskrou 2012). Erosion, industrialisation and the rise of factories reduce the extent of agricultural land, as in Malta, Portugal and Italy (Allaya 1978). To what extent are these new land uses helping to renew territories and create other social, economic and environmental alternatives?

In order to promote and protect the Mediterranean diet, 'heritage' measures are being implemented to guarantee product quality, know-how and farm space (Linck and Romagny 2011). These areas are being turned into tourist destinations (Gay 2011) by promoting local products and new forms of tourist mobility, as is the case in Cap Bon, Tunisia, where wine tourism routes have been set up (Souissi 2023). How are these developments and attempts at preservation helping to (re) shape agricultural landscapes?

Axis 2. Appropriation and dispossession of land

Growing wheat, vines or olives entails adapting land use to the ownership system assigned to the land. Whether the land depends on a state land tenure system or on specific social appropriations, the definition of its use and users necessarily dispossesses other groups with other practices.

By safeguarding the productive use of a plot of land, a public or private authority can put an end to other forms of appropriation (Le Roy 2011). Establishing a land tenure system in the Mediterranean was one of the major political challenges of colonisation. In 1923, Albert Sarrault proposed a plan to "enhance the French colonies", and proclaimed the inability of colonised populations to use their land effectively (Costantini 2008). Land was then assessed in terms of its economic usefulness: Lyautey contrasted the "useful Morocco" of the plains with the "useless Morocco of the tribes and mountains" (quoted by Valette *et al.* 2017, p. 417). Colonisation thus transformed land ownership systems by introducing new crops, such as vines in the lower Seybouse in Algeria (Tatar 2013), or intensifying old ones, such as wheat in Morocco. Today, land planning, whether or not it stems from colonial practices, and its legal counterpart, continues to raise questions about how public action is implemented (Requier-Desjardins *et al.* 2019) and the ensuing reconfigurations of stakeholders, practices and discourses.

The effectiveness of regulating access to agricultural land is widely debated. Tensions are rife between local, state or inter-state appropriations, or between old and new access modes: land is therefore a (geo)political resource (Blanc 2019). Fierce competition for access to Mediterranean land is leading to the fragmentation and closure of agricultural land in favour of tourist residences, such as in Mallorca (Salom 2013), or new peri-urban areas where small farmers are dispossessed (Minvielle *et al.* 2013). Land is a subject of conflict, concerning, for example, access to state-owned land in Tunisia (Gana and Taleb 2019), the management of grazing land in Greece (Koutsou *et al.* 2019), or water distribution in Spain (Salinas Palacios 2019). Land issues therefore call into question the relationship between ownership and uses (Gueringuer *et al.* 2017), as the latter are changing as a result of technical, economic, social and environmental transformations. Farmers on the Beqaa plain in Lebanon, for example, are abandoning wheat in favour of fruit trees, which are

changing as a result of technical, economic, social and environmental transformations. Farmers on the Beqaa plain in Lebanon, for example, are abandoning wheat in favour of fruit trees, which are more profitable but require more water (Trottier and Antonius 2020), while farmers in eastern Zâb (Algeria) prefer to take advantage of improved irrigation to create new olive groves (Tatar 2013).

This theme incites us to examine the interactions between land policies, territories and populations, and also the ways in which the transformation of property ownership is changing perceptions, uses and types of exploitation.

Axis 3. Practices, social and artistic representations

Wheat, vines and olive trees have been at the core of a long-standing political and epistemological appropriation aiming to trace the foundations of an alleged Mediterranean identity, in the same way as the physical and racial essentialisation of a “Homo Mediterraneus” imagined by physical anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century (AS n°1 1896). In a retrospective movement of inventing tradition (Hobsbawm 1983), the Mediterranean was imagined as a “civilisation of wheat” (Braudel 1979), “of the olive tree” (Verdié 1990) or even “of the olive tree and cereals” (Chazan-Gillig 1993), as evidenced by the many allegorical representations borrowing from symbols of the nourishing and fertile land, such as the crown of wheat. The cultural importance of the triad in the Mediterranean is also specifically linked to sacred beliefs. The olive tree was a mythical landmark (Amouretti and Comet 1992), while cereals, wine and oil were essential pillars of Mediterranean polytheisms and then monotheisms (Brun 2003), as can be seen from the Attic ‘red figure’ cups that place the vine at the centre of the representation of the Dionysian cult (Colonna 2011), or veneration dedicated to the goddess Ceres. If we accept that art is a way of looking at the world, the evolution of social representations can be seen through the history of art, which enables us to understand changes and cultural transfers in the Mediterranean basin. For example, the evolution of clay working techniques is celebrated in 19th-century Western realist paintings.

On another level, pictorial and literary orientalism constructed and maintained the myth of exoticism through picturesque representations of an often fantasised elsewhere (Corredor 1992). The aim is to examine this imagined ‘Mediterraneity’ and relate it to the identification processes (Sayad 1993) of Mediterranean inhabitants (Veauvy 2000). Jean Giono, for example, refused “[...] to see his work annexed to the cultural and literary domain of Provence” (Mény 2018: 16).

Contemporary artistic creation is also a way of observing the crises and profound changes that our societies are going through. The temporary exhibition “Quand les artistes passent à table. Leurs regards sur l'alimentation” (Ministry of Culture 2017-2020) shows in particular the appropriation of food practices by artists in relation to their production and distribution networks. So what ideas of ‘Mediterranean culture’ does art convey? How does the hybridisation of the arts and sciences (design, research-creation, etc.) contribute to the construction of imaginary worlds around issues of social, territorial and cultural transformation in the Mediterranean region? This theme calls for reflections on the representational evolution of Mediterranean cultures through artistic practices.

Conclusion

This call for papers is multidisciplinary. The themes are not closed avenues of reflection, as long as the proposals are in keeping with the different sections. Epistemological frameworks and research methodologies can be diverse and varied, with digital or digitised artistic media (photography, images, videos, soundtracks, etc).

Submission requirements

Proposals for contributions should be between 2500 and 5000 characters (including spaces, excluding bibliography). They must contain a title, keywords and the bibliography used. Consult [editorial norms](#).

Proposals should be sent, in Word format (docx), to the following e-mail: **institut-somum-redaction-mem[at]univ-amu.fr**.

Please confirm your status and affiliation in the email.

Provisionnal calendar:

Deadline for the submission of article proposals: **January 8, 2024, 5pm**

Communication of result for the article proposal selection procedure: **mid-January 2024**

Deadline for return of reviewed articles (V1): : **April 3, 2024**

Return of author evaluations (V1): **mid-May 2024**

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