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## Discussion paper

# Sharing Mare Nostrum:

## An analysis of Mediterranean maritime history articles in English-language journals

BY  
**Jari Ojala AND Stig Tenold**

This series consists of papers with limited circulation, intended to stimulate discussion.

**Sharing *Mare Nostrum*:**  
**An analysis of Mediterranean maritime  
history articles in English-language journals**

Jari Ojala

University of Jyväskylä

Stig Tenold

Norwegian School of Economics

**Abstract**

This discussion paper is a follow-up to a previous bibliometric analysis of articles published in *The International Journal of Maritime History* and maritime-themed articles published in other economic and business history journals over the last 25 years. The paper looks more closely at articles dealing with the Mediterranean and articles written by scholars from the Mediterranean countries. The article is structured around five propositions about current trends in Mediterranean maritime history publishing in English-language journals.

JEL-classification: N01, N70, N73, N74

This discussion paper is an English version of "Compartiendo Mare Nostrum: Un análisis de artículos en publicaciones académicas sobre la historia marítima del Mediterráneo", to be published in the proceedings from the 4<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Maritime History Network-conference.

## Introduction

The Mediterranean was the topic of what is probably the most influential piece of maritime historical research, Fernand Braudel's acclaimed book.<sup>1</sup> Still, some researchers have lamented how the region, originally the focus of "the most famous piece of modern historical writing", has lost its influence.<sup>2</sup> The sheer volume of books on the Mediterranean does, however, show that the Mediterranean is still vital as a topic for large monographs, but also that many of the researchers have trouble distancing themselves from the shadows cast by Braudel.

So, while the Mediterranean continues to be subject to vast and voluminous analyses, there is an important undergrowth of more concise and condensed – and less synthesising – scholarship, typically published as chapters in anthologies or as articles in specialist journals. How has this body of research developed over the last decades? The aim of this article is to provide a quantitative assessment of journal articles by maritime history scholars from the Mediterranean countries and articles whose topic is the Mediterranean (or Mediterranean countries).<sup>3</sup>

After an introduction to our database and the manner in which the information has been organised and processed, we have structured the article around five propositions about current journal publishing trends in Mediterranean maritime history:

1. Mediterranean maritime history more frequently than maritime history in general deals with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the period pre-Columbus.

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<sup>1</sup> Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949). After almost a quarter of a century the book was translated into English; *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York 1972/-73)

<sup>2</sup> Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (London, 2000), 43; see the review by Anthony Molho in *Journal of World History*, XIII, No. 2 (2002), 486-492.

<sup>3</sup> The authors would like to thank the participants at the 4<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Maritime History Network-conference in Barcelona in May 2014 for lively discussion and Lauri Karvonen for help in compiling the database.

2. Mediterranean maritime history articles often deal with ports and business/ capital, while other topics – such as fishing or labour – are relatively uncommon
3. There appears to be a "Mediterranean quota" of five to ten per cent of maritime articles in many English-language journals
4. The visibility of the Mediterranean in *The International Journal of Maritime History* has increased over the last 25 years
5. There has been a distinct increase in international journal publishing after the establishment of the Mediterranean Maritime History Network.

### **The empirical basis – and a disclaimer**

The findings in this article are based on two main empirical sources. The first and most important source is *The International Journal of Maritime History* (IJMH), the leading scientific journal within the field of maritime history. The journal has been published under the auspices of the International Maritime Economic History Association (IMEHA) since 1989, and is currently published by Sage and edited by a team at the University of Hull. For the first 24 years of its life the journal's editor-in-chief was the prolific Lewis R. (Skip) Fischer, and the journal's publication closely linked to his place of work, Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. We have built a bibliometric database that contains in-depth information on all articles published in the journal from its inception up to and including 2013, as well as the authors of these articles. The second empirical source is a less detailed database that covers articles with a maritime topic in seven other journals in the economic/ business history field; *Business History*, *Business History Review*, *Economic History Review*, *Enterprise & Society*, *Explorations in Economic History*, *The Journal of*

*Economic History* and *The Journal of Transport History*. From these sources, data has been collected for the same period as for the IJMH.

The empirical data that we use in this article has previously been presented and analysed (though not with a specific Mediterranean focus) in the IJMH, and we refer the readers to that article for a detailed presentation of how the database is built up, what it includes and excludes, etc.<sup>4</sup> In short, the database includes detailed information about articles published in the IJMH. This is supplemented by information about the authors and their affiliations, positions, etc. We analysed a total of 495 published items from the first forty-eight issues of the journal.<sup>5</sup> The size of the journal increased across time, with the number of pages of analysed material growing from around 400 pages per year to around 600.

In order to facilitate quantitative analysis of the material, it was necessary to organise the articles into categories on the basis of certain criteria. Categorisation, or “coding”, was performed by both authors individually, based on the titles and the contents of the articles. Comparing the two sets of codes showed a high degree of correspondence between the decisions of the two authors. For the geographic dimensions, the correspondence was ninety-four per cent.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the determination of the “topic” of the article, we had twelve possible categories. Each article was assigned to one or more of these categories, giving a match between the two authors' sets of codes of more than 96%. If the codes differed, the

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<sup>4</sup> Jari Ojala and Stig Tenold, "What is Maritime History? A Content and Contributor Analysis of the International Journal of Maritime History, 1989–2012", *International Journal of Maritime History*, XXV, No. 2 (December 2013), 17-34.

<sup>5</sup> To keep it simple, we will refer to all the material as articles. Around sixty-three per cent of the analysed items consisted of conventional research articles, sixteen per cent were forum articles, ie articles with a common theme, three per cent were review essays and eighteen per cent can be classified as “other types of material” (bibliographies, conference reports, debates, research notes and source essays). We did not analyse obituaries, communications, roundtables and book reviews.

<sup>6</sup> This categorisation was necessary for three variables: country, geographical area and sea area. The correspondences were 95.8, 97.7 and 89.4 per cent, respectively. Discrepancies were mainly related to the question of sea area; specifically whether articles should be characterised as “Atlantic” or “Global” sea-wise.

article was consulted and the two authors arrived at a joint conclusion, which was then applied. Categorisation such as this is necessary to handle the material quantitatively, but we admit that it is not perfectly able to pick up the full variety of topics covered and the often wide-reaching scope of academic articles. Nevertheless, we believe that such a categorisation enables us to pick up some of the main trends in the development of the published material.

In classifying the geographic area that a specific article was dealing with we included – if applicable – the country, the geographical region (Europe, Asia, America, etc.) and the relevant sea area (Atlantic, Pacific, Baltic, Mediterranean, Antarctic, Indian Ocean or Global). We have also noted the academic affiliation – though not place of birth – of all authors.<sup>7</sup> In this article, we have isolated the "Mediterranean" dimension. Thus, we can compare to which extent the Mediterranean material – articles on the Mediterranean ocean, articles on Mediterranean countries and articles by authors based in Mediterranean countries – differs from the whole body of articles.

Before we proceed with the analysis, a major disclaimer is in order. This article is not an evaluation of Mediterranean maritime history research or publishing, but a quantification of one element of such – only works published in English are included. Still, we do not want to claim that we provide a quantification of Mediterranean history research in English – in order to do that we would have to include other outlets (monographs and anthologies, which – as the introduction showed – are still highly relevant) and additional journals (we are totally neglecting those geared towards important disciplines such as, for instance, archaeology,

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<sup>7</sup> Ideally, we would have liked to be able to distinguish between, for instance, a Spanish-born and educated scholar working in a university in the United States and an American-born and educated scholar working in the same institution. Such a distinction would make our analysis even richer – to which extent is, for instance, research on the Mediterranean in US universities performed by scholars with a background from the region? However, questions of national affiliation have become so complex that they do not permit easy classification, and the necessary data would also be extremely difficult to gather.

sociology, economics, etc.). Perhaps the best way to judge this article is to see it as an analysis of the Mediterranean dimension of the IJMH, with a smattering of some other economic and business history journals thrown in to widen the focus slightly. Still, although our focus is quite narrow, we think – and hope – that our findings may be useful in stimulating a discussion about Mediterranean maritime history and among Mediterranean maritime historians.

### **Language, countries and seas**

Like many – most? – scholarly journals published in English, there is a certain Anglophone bias in the IJMH. Almost half of the articles in the journal dealt primarily with the UK, the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand, and almost two thirds of the authors were working for institutions in these Anglophone countries. Still, the Anglophone dimension has declined across time, from more than 70 per cent of the authors in the 1990s to around 55 per cent in the period 2001-10.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the geographical area covered in the articles, only one Mediterranean country – Spain, with 18 articles – is in the Top 10 of countries covered.<sup>9</sup> Unsurprisingly, The United Kingdom, with more than 150 articles tops the list, followed by The United States with almost forty articles. Canada and The Netherlands – both with 19 articles – are also ahead of Spain. The countries in the Top Ten were the subject of around two thirds of the journal, measured by the number of pages.

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<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all our statistics are based on information from the database.

<sup>9</sup> Please see Ojala and Tenold, "What is maritime history?" for the complete list.

Of the other Mediterranean countries, France and Greece, with ten and nine articles respectively, are just outside the Top 10 of countries covered. However, a closer scrutiny of the Spanish articles reveals that they to a very little extent deal with the Mediterranean. Indeed, 14 of the articles on Spain have a "geographic marker" or reference to a point onshore in their titles. Interestingly, not a single one of these refers to the Mediterranean coast – the majority refer to the Atlantic Coast.<sup>10</sup>

More than half of the articles that have been published in the IJMH deal with some aspect of the Atlantic world. This clearly reflects the dominance of Europe and the Americas within maritime history – or even more precisely: the dominance of the UK and the US – both among authors and among topics. The Mediterranean (including the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov) was the main topic of slightly less than seven per cent of the articles in the IJMH, trailing the Pacific (8.9%) and the Indian Ocean (7.3%) as well.<sup>11</sup>

How, then, did the research on the Mediterranean – and the Mediterranean researchers – differ from those articles dealing with "the rest of the world"? And how has research on the Mediterranean developed across time? In order to answer these two questions, we have let the data do the talking.<sup>12</sup> The rest of this article has been organised around five propositions about Mediterranean maritime economic history, all found by looking in more detail at the empirical material that we have gathered.

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<sup>10</sup> The most important geographical markers are Bilbao and Galicia, with three articles each, followed by the Canary Islands, Euskal Herria (País Vasco) and Seville. Four articles do not have a national geographical indicator.

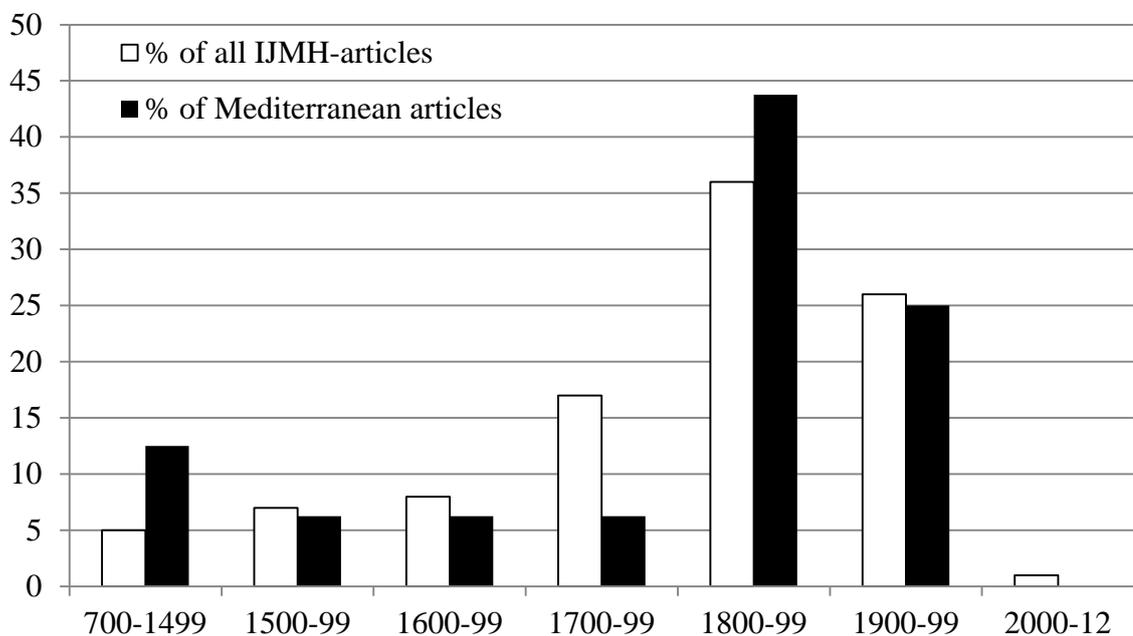
<sup>11</sup> In our analysis of sea area, we have defined the Mediterranean as the continuous (natural) body of water east of Gibraltar, ie the Mediterranean proper (including the Strait of Gibraltar, the Alboran Sea, the Balearic Sea, the Ligurian Sea, the Tyrrhenian Sea, the Ionian Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Aegean Sea) as well as the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov; see International Hydrographic Organization, *Limits of Oceans and Seas – Special Publication No. 28* (Monte Carlo, 1953), 16-18. Our discussion of Mediterranean countries and author affiliations is restricted to countries that border on the Mediterranean proper.

<sup>12</sup> We should add here that when the data does the talking, it does so with a relatively weak voice. Our "Mediterranean" data is based on only 33 articles in the case of the main database, and it is thus unlikely that any of the results presented in the following would have a very impressive statistical significance.

*1. Mediterranean maritime history more frequently than maritime history in general deals with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the period pre-Columbus.*

Chart 1 compares the main time periods covered in the IJM<sup>H</sup> in total and in the Mediterranean articles. It is evident that there are no substantial and systematic differences between the time period covered in articles on the Mediterranean and the other articles.

Chart 1. Time coverage of the articles, based on starting year of article, per cent



Source: The IJM<sup>H</sup>-database

Still, the Mediterranean research is particularly strong on the period before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but this is not a new finding: Harlaftis and Vasallo partly explain the "clear bias towards the early modern period" in an anthology of Mediterranean maritime history by "the shadow cast

by past grandeur."<sup>13</sup> There also appears to be a slight overrepresentation of works dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Correspondingly, the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in particular, but also the years after 1900 appear to be of less interest to Mediterranean maritime scholars than to those in the rest of the world.

Our previous analysis suggested that there might be a tendency for authors to focus on the "glorious" periods in which their national fleets have a relatively important position internationally.<sup>14</sup> The Mediterranean focus on the very early period does not refer to any "past glory" in that respect, but probably reflects the fact that for the period before 1500 the "competition" is smaller – for instance from the west side of the Atlantic...

*2. Mediterranean maritime history articles focus on ports and business/ capital, while other topics – such as fishing or labour – are relatively uncommon*

Our overall analysis of the topics covered in the journal reveals that there are three categories that have not been dealt with by scholars working on the Mediterranean; piracy, fishing (including whaling and sealing) and labour.<sup>15</sup>

Chart 2 shows that the omission of these topics is partly reflected in a higher-than-average interest in ports and business and capital. Given that "the cultural turn" in history in general – and maritime history in particular – has at times been associated with scholars from the Mediterranean region, it is interesting to note that the category "culture" appears to be

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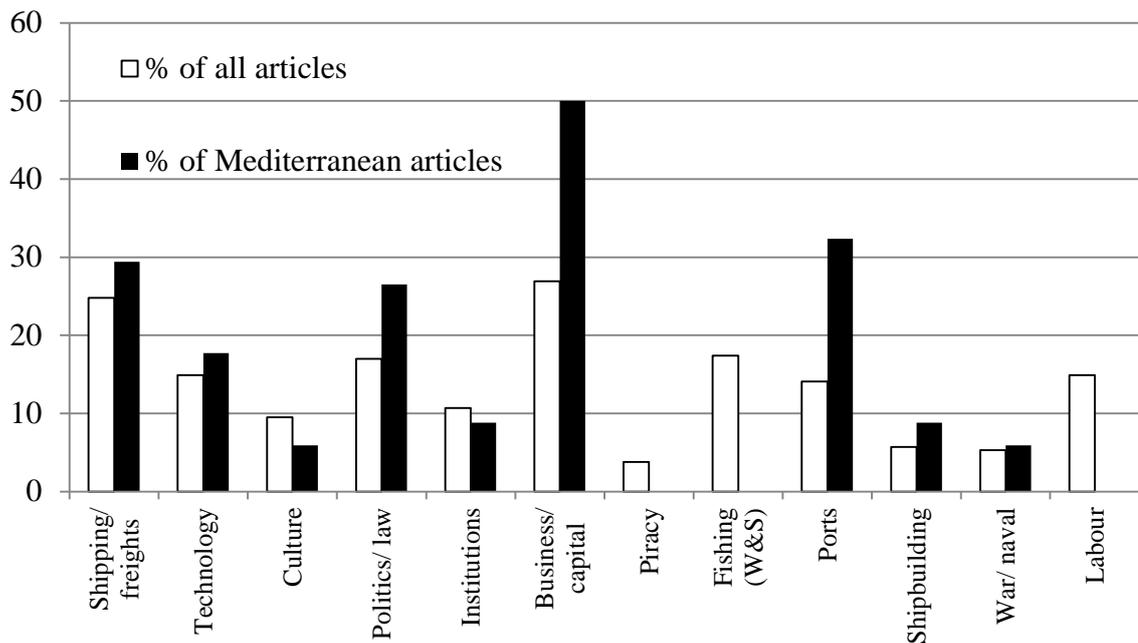
<sup>13</sup> Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vasallo, "Preface" in Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vasallo (eds) *New Directions in Maritime History* (St. John's, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Ojala and Tenold, "What is maritime history?", 27.

<sup>15</sup> In the first volume after our database ends, the IJM published an article on fishing. Dealing with Catalonia, it is also the first article on Spain in 25 years to have a "geographical marker" on the Mediterranean side; Eliseu Carbonell, "Not just any port after a storm: The commemoration and heritagization of fishing in Catalonia", *International Journal of Maritime History*, XXVI, No. 2 (May 2014), 288-303. With regard to topics, individual articles could be assigned to more than one category.

"underrepresented" based on the data that we have available.<sup>16</sup> This might reflect the fact that if such a regional bias towards this type of historical research actually exists, a facilitating infrastructure, including local publishing opportunities, might reduce the dissemination to international audiences.

Chart 2. Topic of the articles, per cent



Source: The IJMH-database

*3. There appears to be a "Mediterranean quota" of five to ten per cent of maritime articles in many English-language journals*

In order to complement the database of articles published in the IJMH, we investigated maritime-themed articles in some other international journals within the fields of economic

<sup>16</sup> On this issue, see Hugh Murphy "An open letter to the International Maritime Economic History Association", *International Journal of Maritime History*, XXIV, No. 2 (December 2012), 251.

and business history. As Table 1 shows, we are now entering a field where the number of observations in the different categories is very limited. Still, it is interesting to note that the proportion of maritime articles that have a Mediterranean topic, with a few exceptions appears to be relatively stable across publishing outlets.

Table 1. Maritime-themed articles in selected journals, 1977 to 2012

Journal	Maritime articles	Mediterranean articles	Share
The IJMH	495	33	6.7%
The Journal of Transport History	75	4	5.3%
The Journal of Economic History	24	2	8.3%
Business History Review	23	2	8.7%
Economic History Review	23	2	8.7%
Business History	20	1	5.0%
Explorations in Economic History	18	0	0%
Enterprise & Society	5	1	20%

Source: Extended database. See Ojala and Tenold, "What is maritime history?", 32-34.

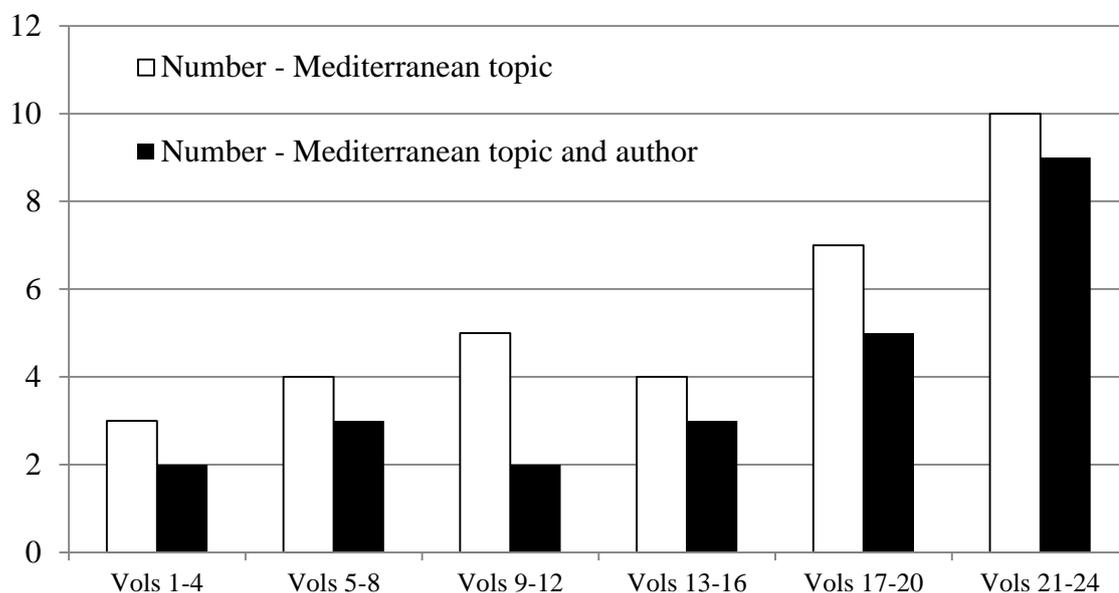
Note: Based on a subjective judgment of whether or not an article has a “maritime” topic. Our guiding principle has been to include articles with clearly defined maritime topics (for instance shipping, whaling, ports or shipbuilding) and omit articles that deal with maritime-*related* topics (for instance slavery and slave transport).

As Table 1 shows, the proportion of maritime articles that deals with the Mediterranean is surprisingly uniform across journals, varying from five per cent to 8.7%. The positive exception, the high proportion of Mediterranean articles in Enterprise & Society, can be explained by a very small number of observations. The other, and negative, exception – Explorations in Economic History – may be explained by the fact that the maritime articles in the journal had an extreme Anglophone bias. Only two of the 18 articles were written by scholars without any affiliation to North American or English universities.

#### 4. The visibility of the Mediterranean in the IJMH has increased over the last 25 years

The previous analysis has treated the last quarter of a century as a more or less static period, ignoring the dynamics. However, we alluded earlier to the fact that the proportion of Anglophone-centred contributions has declined across time. This has, as Chart 3 shows, occurred in tandem with an increase in the visibility of articles on the Mediterranean.

Chart 3. Number of Mediterranean articles – by period and topic/ author affiliation



Source: The IJMH-database

Note: The difference between the two series reflects the fact that some scholars from non-Mediterranean countries write about the Mediterranean. Scholars from Mediterranean countries writing on non-Mediterranean topics have not been included.

The increase across time is partly a result of a growing number of articles in the IJMH, though even if we adjust for that, there is still a relative increase of Mediterranean publications. There can be a number of reasons for such growth; a shift in publishing strategies – at the researcher

or journal level – fashions within topics or methods, changed incentives for international publication, etc. The growth might also be the result of a facilitating infrastructure: interestingly, there appears to be a watershed shortly after the first conference organised by the Mediterranean Maritime History Network in 2002.<sup>17</sup> This network was established by Mediterranean researchers participating in the conferences of the IMEHA.

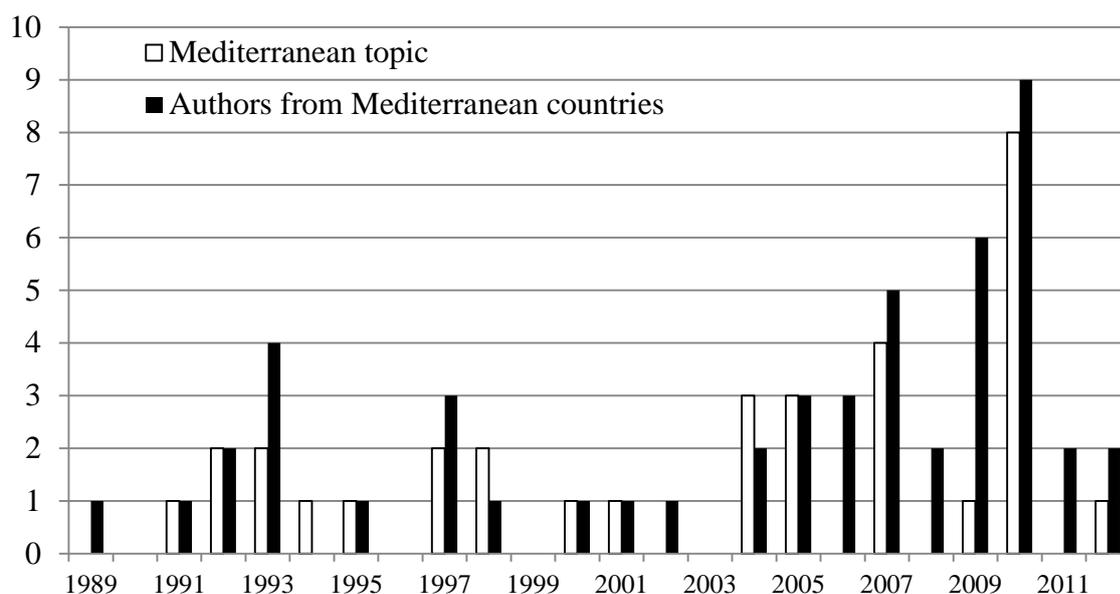
*5. There is a distinct increase in international journal publishing after the establishment of the Mediterranean Maritime History Network*

It is unlikely that the establishment of research collaborations leads to immediate results, so in order to allow some time for the Network to "take effect" we have used 2003 as the watershed. The results are striking; up to and including 2003 there was an annual average of 0.86 articles on the Mediterranean in the *IJM*H; for the period 2004-12 the corresponding figure was 2.22 articles. The development is even more impressive if we look at articles written by scholars based in the Mediterranean countries. In first era, 1989-2003, the average annual output was 1.06 articles – from 2004 onwards it has more than trebled to 3.78 articles. Again, the increase in the number of articles in total provides part of the explanation, but again the increase is so large as to imply that there is a relative improvement as well.

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<sup>17</sup> On the history of the Mediterranean Maritime History Network, see Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vasallo, "Maritime History Since Braudel" in Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vasallo (eds) *New Directions in Maritime History* (St. John's, 2004), 1-20.

Chart 4. Mediterranean articles – topic and author affiliation



Source: The IJMH-database

Note: The difference between these series and the data that was the basis for chart 3 is the fact that authors from the Mediterranean countries are included regardless of the geographical topic of their research. Thus, this includes all French and Spanish authors, for instance.

Impressively, even this strong growth is likely to underestimate the increase in the visibility of Mediterranean maritime research over the last decade or so. For instance, one of the early effects of the increased regional cooperation was a special issue of *Research in Maritime History*, which provided a much needed up-to-date historiography for a number of Mediterranean countries.<sup>18</sup> Research from the Mediterranean Maritime History Network Conferences has also been disseminated through three special issues of *The Journal of Mediterranean Studies*.<sup>19</sup> An aside: the aim of this article has been to gauge the development of Mediterranean article in maritime history journals – a natural follow-up could be to

<sup>18</sup> Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vasallo (eds) *New Directions in Maritime History* (St. John's, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> These were Volume 12, No. 2 (2002), which also included a directory of Mediterranean maritime historians; Volume 16, Nos. 1-2 (2006) and Volume 19, No. 2 (2010).

evaluate the development of maritime articles in Mediterranean history journals, including the national-language history journals in the various Mediterranean countries. Has the volume or share of maritime history research in these journals also increased?

### **Concluding comments**

In 2004, Harlaftis and Vasallo categorically claimed that "Mediterranean maritime history has been underrepresented in the publications and congresses of the International Maritime Economic History Association (IMEHA) during the 1990s."<sup>20</sup> This discussion paper – as well as our previous research – confirms that there has been an Atlantic bias within maritime history. Moreover, this quantitative research enables us to test – or at least empirically confirm, reject or discuss – claims such as the one quoted above.

We believe that the five propositions in this article say something about the orientation and development of Mediterranean maritime history. Still, it is "the view from the North"; a long-distance, blue-eyed view from two scholars with only limited knowledge of the topic *per se*, but with the instruments needed to put it into perspective.

Thus, our analysis, due to a limited sample and language restrictions, only scratches the surface.<sup>21</sup> A thorough, multilateral and multilingual analysis in the same vein is necessary to give a more precise picture of the development of Mediterranean maritime history over the last decades. We leave that to the locals.

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<sup>20</sup> Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vasallo, "Preface", vii. If we calculate the share of the world's ocean surface, relative to the share of the journal articles, this is not the case. The Mediterranean would in fact be overrepresented by a factor of more than seven; 5.8 per cent of the articles in the first twelve volumes of the journal, compared with 0.8 per cent of the world's sea area.

<sup>21</sup> We have tried to avoid making any comments on language of publication, but understand that we – given our choice of data – could be interpreted as advocating publications in English as opposed to those published in the various languages of the region. We do not have any such agenda. However, we would like to point out that if scholars from the region want reach out to the international community of researchers, they have to accept that English has – somewhat ironically – become the *lingua franca*.

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## 2015

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