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THE CONCEPT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AMERICAN MEDITERRANEAN

EMŐKE HORVÁTH

Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church
Budapest, Hungary

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Abstract: This paper presents a less familiar topic, the concept and characterisation of the American Mediterranean and its specific features. It addresses the fundamental similarities and differences between the European and the American Mediterranean. The study analyses the role of peninsulas in the American Mediterranean and highlights the cultural, linguistic and religious divisions within the region.
Keywords: American Mediterranean, European Mediterranean, Caribbean Region, Cultural Identity, Slavery.

1. Introduction

When we hear the term "Mediterranean", we immediately think of the European Mediterranean coastline, even though it is a well-known phenomenon in history that regions with the same name can be located in regions far apart. As a single example, we need only refer to the work of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus: *De Administrando Imperio*, written in the 10th century (chap. 23), in which we read: "There are two Iberias: one around the columns of Heracles, named after the river Iber [...]. The other Iberia is towards the Persians" (1949). In the same way, there are two Mediterraneans: in addition to the geographic area that everyone knows, the concept of "American Mediterranean", far from Europe, has survived to the present day, although the latter is not used in public discourse.

In my work, I seek to raise questions related to the geographical and cultural characteristics of the "American Mediterranean". First, I will discuss the origins of the term "American Mediterranean", then describe the geographical boundaries of it, also known as the Caribbean, and try to draw out the common cultural features of the Caribbean. Why is the latter necessary? This is because it is only on the basis of common features that can be grasped through culture that the areas that can be included in the concept of the Caribbean can be defined. Finally, I will compare some of the characteristics of the region with those of the "European Mediterranean" and try to identify the elements that can be mentioned as common points or as decisive differences between the two regions.

2. Birth of the term "American Mediterranean"

Fernand Braudel chose as the motto for his work (Braudel 1949; Braudel 1996, inside cover) on the Mediterranean a passage from the Spanish Jesuit priest José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*. Acosta, in his work, published in Seville in 1590, said that no Mediterranean Sea had been found in the New World like the one in Europe, Asia and Africa[1]. By contrast, centuries later, Alexander von Humboldt, in his notes on his travels to the Americas between 1799 and 1804, described the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico as a kind of Mediterranean ("le bassin des Antilles forme, comme nous 'avons deja appelé, une Méditerranée"). Susan Gillman has shown (2014, 505-528) how Humboldt built on the cultural and linguistic foundations of the "Mediterranean" to integrate the concept of the Mediterranean into the geography of the Americas. It should be noted that the method itself was nothing new, since it was the experience of Spanish and Portuguese sailors, soldiers and priests from the time of the discoveries that they were able to describe the landscapes, geographical and physical phenomena they observed in the new continents using only their own vocabulary, the phenomena they knew well from Europe. Consider the reports of Hernán Cortés, who, when reporting on the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán, constantly compared it to the Spanish cities he and his readers knew well, Seville or Córdoba, and the size of the main square, which he described as "twice the size of the city of Salamanca" (León-Portilla 1977, 254-255). Humboldt's later practice only continued the transposition of European designations to the Americas.

Humboldt returned several times to the description of the Caribbean region in his work, which he once refered to from a more geographical point of view, in terms of the sea exited: "the West Indian Sea, which we have called the Mediterranean with its many outlets". At other times, he called the sea by its name and refered to its past in European history: "[...] the little Caribbean, a kind of Mediterranean, on whose shores almost all the nations of Europe have founded colonies". Finally, Humboldt included the shores of Venezuela, New Granada, the United States of America and

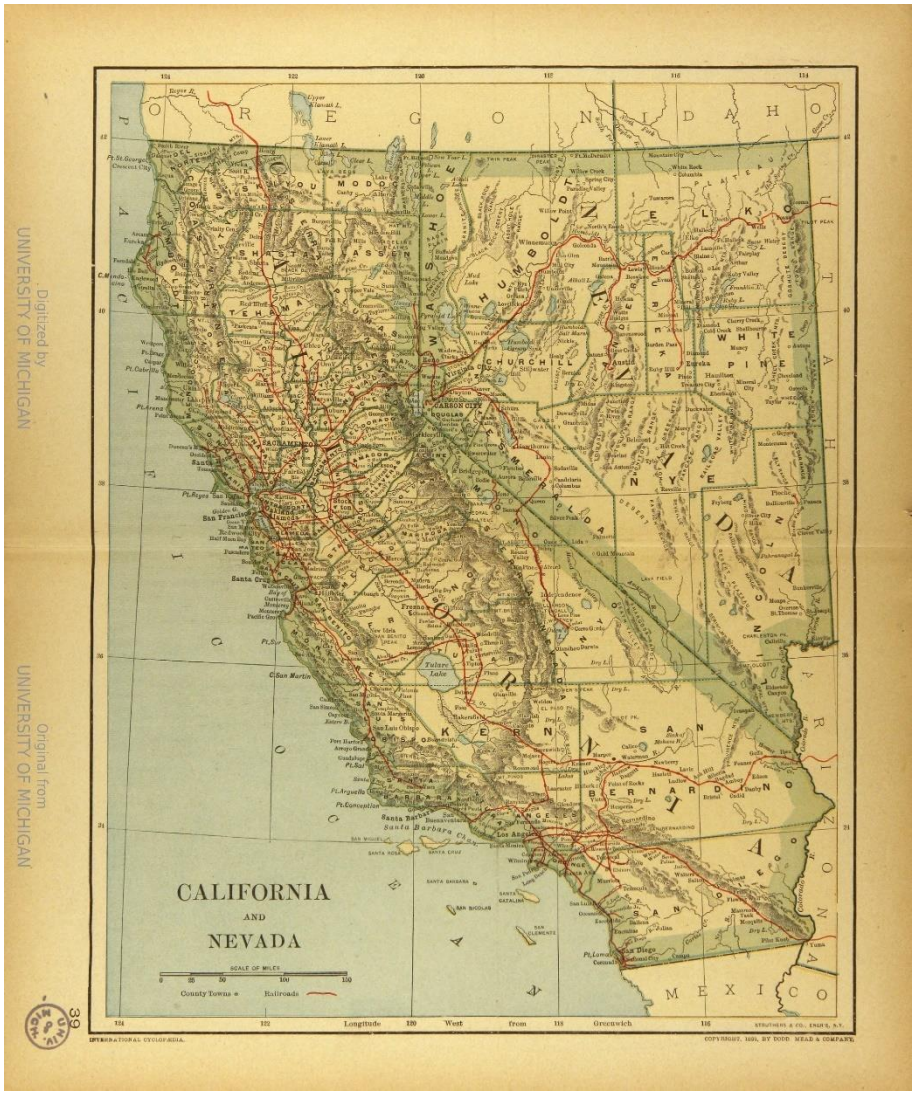
[1] "No se ha hasta ahora en el nuevo orbe descubierto mar Mediterráneo, como le tienen Europa, Asia y África, en las cuales entran unos brazos de aquel inmenso mar y hacen mares distintos, tomando los nombres de las provincias y tierras que bañan, y cuasi todos estos mares mediterráneos se continúan entre sí y, al cabo, con el mismo océano, en el estrecho de Gibraltar, que los antiguos nombraron columnas de Hércules. Aunque el mar Rojo, desasido de esotros mediterráneos, por sí se entra en el océano Índico, y el mar Caspio con ninguno se junta" (Acosta 1954).

the West Indies archipelago in the concrete geographical definition of the "American Mediterranean"[2].

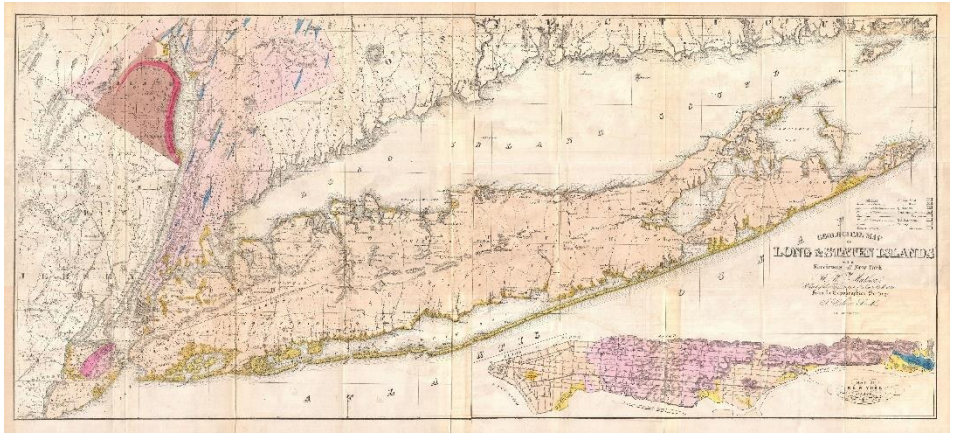
In the 19th century, natural history writers and politicians throughout North America called new regions the "Mediterranean", thus also in relation to California and Long Island Sound they spoke about "American Mediterranean" (Gillman 2014, 509). Mid-century Senator and Secretary of State Daniel Webster (1850-1852) described Long Island Sound as the "American Mediterranean" (Weigold-Pillsbury, 1), and the 1866 volume of *The Congressional Globe* spoke of the area as if the name were common: "[...] the Sound, which is the great inland water of New England, known as the American Mediterranean [...]" (June 6, 2996). By this time, it seems that the term launched by Webster had become a fully accepted and used adjective in political discourse (Weigold-Pillsbury 2014, 1-46). French geographer Élisée Reclus devoted an entire chapter (VI) of his book *The Earth and Its Inhabitants: Mexico, Central America, West Indies*, published in 1876, to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, which he called "The American Mediterranean" (Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea). In his work, Reclus analysed the geography, climate, flora, fauna, major currents, hurricanes and population of the region (1876, 338-353).

From what has been said, it is easy to conclude that 19th-century researchers always used the term "American Mediterranean" in a geographical sense, did not examine its cultural complexity, did not raise questions about the internal characteristics of the region, and only compared the European Mediterranean with the similarly closed American area on the basis of geographical characteristics.

[2] "[…] that American Mediterranean, formed by the shores of Venezuela, New Granada, Mexico, the United States, and the West Indian islands […]" cited by Gillman (2014, 509-510).



Map 1. Map of California and Nevada, Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1894, HathiTrust. Source: https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001877379



Map 2. Geological Map of Long & Staten Islands with the Environs of New York, 1842, Geographicus. Rare antique maps.
Source: https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/LongIsland-mather-1842

3. The geographical framework and cultural characteristics of the American Mediterranean

Despite the attempts made in North America in the 19th century, there is now no dispute that for all authors the concept of the "American Mediterranean" is the same as that of the "Caribbean". However, it is not at all clear which geographical area can be defined as the Caribbean. Over the last thirty years, and in particular as a result of the writings of Antonio Gaztambide-Géigel and Norman Girvan, the geographical boundaries of the region have become less and less self-evident (Gaztambide-Géigel 1996, 74-96; Girvan 2000, 6-34; Tézer 2020, 203-212; Tézer 2021, 7-17)[3]. The inclusion or exclusion of the Gulf of Mexico area is the most controversial issue. It was representatives of the social sciences and geopolitical interpretations who integrated the Gulf of Mexico region into the concept of the "Caribbean". The most prominent theorist on the issue was Nicholas John Spykman, an American professor of international relations, who in 1942 elaborated on the definition of the "American Mediterranean" in his book *America's Strategy in World Politics* (Spykman 2008)[4]. The emphasis on the role of geography and its inclusion in North American political analysis is linked to his name: he examined the issue from a foreign policy perspective in two longer studies (Sempa 2008, XII). He said the US Mediterranean is the transit route linking the continent north-south and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This view makes it easy to interpret Spykman's approach: that is

[3] The summary text on this topic is based on my work: Horváth 2014, 23-35.
[4] Spykman's work is analysed from a geostrategic perspective (Fischer 2002, 45-61).

to say, he assigned to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean a function corresponding to that of a mediating region between the three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. According to Spykman, the term "American Mediterranean" includes Mexico and Central America, Colombia, most of Venezuela and the series of islands from the eastern part of Venezuela to the western end of Cuba. He explained that, like the Mediterranean basin, the "American Mediterranean" could be divided into two parts, the former including the Gulf of Mexico and the latter the Caribbean Sea, and the southern coast of North America, which he considered to be its most important area, was also included in the concept of the "American Mediterranean".

Spykman focused mainly on the strategic importance of the American Mediterranean: 1. as a link between North and South America, 2. and between the Pacific and Atlantic regions. The Panama Canal, completed in 1914, opened up huge opportunities by significantly shortening the distance between Pacific and Atlantic ports and between Europe and the Pacific and Asia and the Atlantic. Spykman argued –and I agree– that the reason why US supremacy in the "American Mediterranean" had been able to develop so strongly is that the small islands and the smaller political entities that were typical of the region, due to the geography of Central America, were unable to counteract or counterbalance it. He said that trade in the region was at the discretion of the United States, and that the coastal countries could be blockaded at any time and thus easily removed from world trade. In his view, this situation has resulted in Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela becoming totally dependent on the US (Spykman 2008, 60).

In the following, I would like to reflect on Spykman's concept of the "American Mediterranean", but to do so, I need to formulate my own interpretation of the Caribbean, to draw the boundaries of its geographical extent. In order to do so, it is useful to first review the cultural specificities of the area[5]. The literature attributes the common features of the Caribbean to the co-existence of colonialism, sugar plantations and black slave labour, and I accept this definition. The long-lasting presence of this triple factor is most evident in the case of the islands. The number of black people trafficked, the proportion of the population of each island, is crucial to the identity of the region. However, the proportion of labour of African descent in each European colony was not the same. By the 1720s, it is estimated that around 58 per cent of them had arrived to the territories held by the English, Dutch, Danes and Swedes (Klein 2010, 22-23). I explain the different proportion of slaves of African origin by the presence of three factors. 1st: The English, the French, the Dutch, the Danes and the Swedes owned sugar plantations almost exclusively on an industrial scale. In the Spanish-speaking islands, however, tobacco growing was just as important, requiring completely different cultivation conditions (Ortiz 1982, 72-89). Because the crop was grown on small estates, by peasants and tenants, without

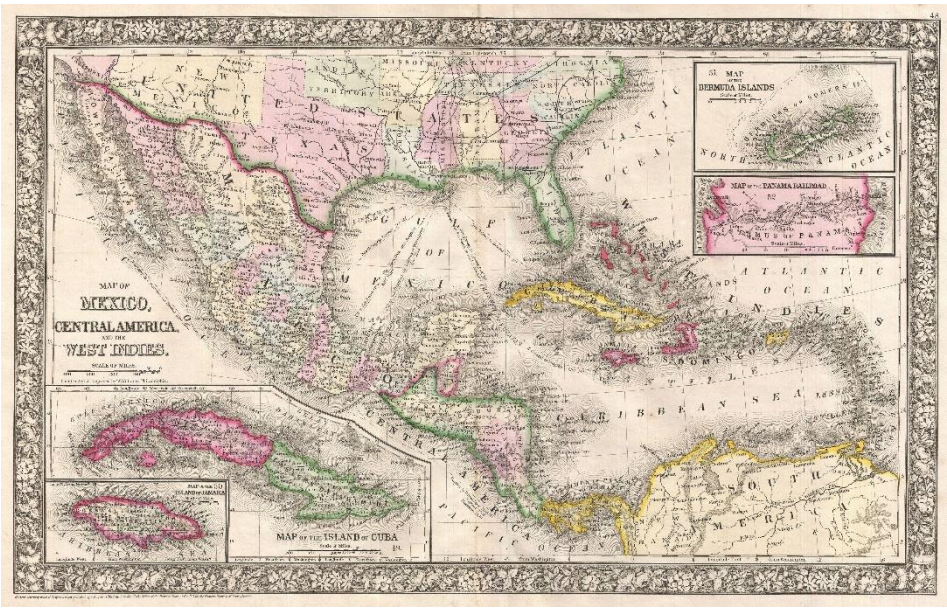
[5] See also Tézer 2021, 7-17.

mechanisation, and this method was completely different from the sugar plantations, which absorbed large numbers of black workers (Hingman 2008, 2)[6]. In other words, the striking difference between the cultivation of sugar and tobacco also influenced the evolution of the number of races. 2nd: The other factor to be mentioned is also linked to production in the Spanish islands. The mechanisation of the sugar factories here came later, so there are no large estates in the 17th and 18th centuries, and then only from the 1820s onwards, so there is no need for such a large number of black workers in the early days as in the later period, meaning that the large labour force in the Spanish islands dates from around the time of, or after, the abolition of slavery. 3rd: Finally, I want to refer to the practice in the English colonies. The owners of sugar plantations were not personally involved in the management of their estates, they did not live in the Caribbean (*absentee landlords*), but stayed at home, their interests being represented on the islands by hired stewards. The stewards were in most cases single men, so no family came with them. This practice greatly reduced the presence of whites in the West Indies. I would like to illustrate what I have said with just one piece of data. In 1750, Jamaica had 142 000 inhabitants, 90 percent of the population were slaves, and whites made up only 9 percent (Hingman 2005, 2). The population of the Spanish Antilles, on the other hand, had a very different composition. Those of European origin in certain sectors of the administration and the economy left their original homeland and lived with their families in the region, making the island their home. In addition, there has been virtually continuous European immigration to the Spanish islands, particularly to Cuba, albeit to varying degrees from one period to another. In the immediate aftermath of Cuba's independence, a major wave of immigration from the former mainland to the island nation was triggered by the influx of North American capital into the sugar industry (Clarke 2013, 7). Between 1700 and 1870, 942 000 Africans were enslaved in the Spanish Caribbean, 1 556 000 in the British Caribbean, 1 110 000 in the French Caribbean, 377 000 in the Dutch Caribbean and 57 000 in the Danish Caribbean (GHC 1999, 60). Despite the impact of the slave trade, the region's racial distribution in 1830 showed that the Spanish islands were almost ten times more whiter, and the demographic indicators of the 19th century still have an impact on the ethnic composition and identity of the islands today (GHC 1999, 50-53)[7]. In sum, based on the historical tradition, the concept of the Caribbean for me is strictly the archipelagos of the Lesser and Greater Antilles, and the dominant presence of the three criteria established in the literature can only

[6] Hingman showed that in the region, Jamaica was the leader in sugar production, but was in very close competition with St. Domingue, which was in French hands and had a more advanced irrigation system. In 1790, Jamaica produced 0.18 tonnes of sugar per capita, St. Domingue 0.17 tonnes.

[7] In 1830, the region's population by race was 532 935 whites and 359 458 Africans living in the Spanish-dominated islands. In contrast, the British Isles had a total of 54 772 white inhabitants and 684 996 Africans. In the French islands, there were 21 643 whites and 202 940 blacks.

be applied to the Caribbean Island chain. Historically speaking, the concept of the Greater Caribbean (Lesser and Greater Antilles, the whole of Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela), which is now very widespread, is not based on a geographical framework, but is rather the 'product' of a policy of artificially fostering a myth of common identity in order to underpin the economic integrationist aspirations of the region. The geopolitical approach of including the entire territory of the Central American countries (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama) in the Caribbean is also devoid of historical tradition (Garay Vargas and Montilla 2009, 80).



Map 3. Map of Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies, 1866, Mitchell Jr., S. A., Mitchell's New General Atlas, containing Maps of the Various Countries of the World Plans of Cities, Etc. Embraced in Fifty-Five Quarto Maps. Forming a series of Eighty-Seven Maps and Plans. Together with Valuable Statistical Tables., (Philadelphia) 1866., Geographicus. Rare antique maps.
Source: https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/WestIndies-mitchell-1866

4. Comparison of some characteristics of the two Mediterraneans

They are of roughly the same size, but the "European Mediterranean" is a more closed area and is better situated for direct transport between three continents (Europe, Africa and Asia). The long-distance trade routes (silk road, spice trade routes)

which the merchants of the Medieval Italian city-states (Venice, Genoa, Pisa) were able to follow enabled them to become depositories of the extraordinary wealth which characterised the Mediterranean. In the case of the "American Mediterranean", only one continent can be linked to its immediate coastline, but from the colonial period onwards, it was shaped by the presence of the mainland countries of another continent, Europe, and one of its geographical units, the Mediterranean. And a third continent, Africa, came to play an intensive role in the region with the dominance of slave-owning plantation agriculture. Trade with the "American Mediterranean", the precious metals or cargoes of crops (sugar, tobacco, cocoa, coffee) from ships plying its waters, also became sources of extraordinary wealth, as did the local planters through the sale of their crops.

A comparison between the two areas can be made on the issue of the presence or absence of straits and the possibility of linking with the oceans. In this respect, the eastern basin of the "European Mediterranean" is closed, with the Bosphorus linking it to the Black Sea, and is a key link between Europe and Asia, but it does not provide access to the ocean. The western basin of the Mediterranean is open to the Atlantic through the Strait of Gibraltar. The "American Mediterranean" is the depository of the transit route linking the continent north-south and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. However, it is not a natural sea route to the Pacific Ocean, but the man-made Panama Canal, which did not exist in colonial times (it was not opened until 1914), meaning that the "American Mediterranean" was also a more closed area at the time. Man-made sea passages were also built in the Mediterranean, with the Suez Canal (opened in 1869) providing access to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea.

Both areas are, as Braudel said, "the shadow side of the lowland economy: they are geared to growing a few profitable crops, but have to get part of their daily food from outside" (Braudel 1996, 80). In the "European Mediterranean", the triad of grapes, wine and olive oil is well known. In the "American Mediterranean", these are counterpointed by sugar, rum and tobacco. Andalusia, for example, was rich in the three Mediterranean crops mentioned above, but it depended on cereal imports to feed its population, and would have been unable to survive without the wheat of North Africa from Roman times onwards. The Spaniards, who moved to the New World as a result of colonisation, insisted on the flavours of their homeland and imported olive oil from the Iberian Peninsula from the very beginning. The Crown has always insisted on the importation of oil and banned the planting of olive trees in Latin America (Jefferson and Lokken 2011, XIII; Francis 2010/I, 6–8). The Caribbean also imported many crops in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is well known that the British Isles had close economic links with the colonies in the North American territory, from where, among other things, cereals and rice were brought to the British Caribbean Islands (McFarlane 1994, 238). Both Mediterranean crops (vines, olive trees) are indigenous to the region and their cultivation dates back

thousands of years. In contrast, the two main products of the Caribbean have also been dominated by the presence of colonialists. Sugar cane was introduced to the Americas through Spanish mediation during Columbus' second voyage, and it was the Spanish who introduced plantation farming (Richardson 1992, 26). But tobacco is a plant native to the Americas, first encountered by Columbus. It originated in the Peruvian and Ecuadorian regions of the Andes. The plant has a wide variety of uses. It quickly conquered Europe and then the whole world, being cultivated in Spain from 1558, from where it was introduced to France and soon became known in England, Italy and Russia. In 1575 it was introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish (Braudel 1985, 267).

Fernand Braudel described the European Mediterranean as a dual region, emphasising the role of the peninsulas (Iberia, Italy, the Balkans, Asia Minor), which are covered by mountains and divided by plains. The other aspect of the Mediterranean is the sea, which is divided into parts and cannot be treated as a single body of water, but rather as a collection of seas (Braudel 1996, 15-16). This type of division is only partially observed in the case of the "American Mediterranean". Although peninsulas are also found in this geographical region, they are much less numerous. The Yucatan Peninsula and Florida are the most notable within the region. Although the Yucatán Peninsula is geographically part of the Caribbean, it has a different cultural past, since it is the region of Mexico that is the defining area of classical Mayan history, the site of important pre-Columbian city-states such as Chichén Itza, Uxmal and Tulum, and thus the bearer of an ancient indigenous past. Setting out from Cuba, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba was the first European to land in the Yucatán to explore the areas south of Cuba. From that moment on, a fairly close relationship was forged between the peninsula and Cuba, which, although it was an intense relationship at certain historical events, especially from the 19th century onwards (Álvarez Cuartero 2007, 559-576), is not in itself sufficient to include the peninsula in the concept of the "American Mediterranean". To belong to the Caribbean, the three criteria mentioned above –colonialism, sugar plantations and black slave labour– must be met, but only the fact of colonialism is fully met. Although two towns on the peninsula –Campeche and Mérida– did have a "human market", as ships also transported slaves there, their turnover was relatively small. According to sources, two English slave traders were authorised to transport 199 slaves to Campeche in the early 1730s, while 167 blacks from the Spanish side arrived in the same port between 1731 and 1733. The figures show that the numbers of blacks only allowed them to participate in domestic labour. Slave owners generally owned one or two slaves and only five per cent owned ten or more (Landers and Robinson 2006, 151). The proportion of black slaves in the ethnic composition of the peninsula was thus not significant, and their presence was far below that of the Caribbean Islands. What has been said so far also reflects the absence of two fundamental factors: the dominant presence of African slaves and the intensive

presence of plantation farming in the Yucatán Peninsula's past, and consequently the dominant demographic factor up to the present day is the Amerindian and *mestizo* populations and their pre-Columbian past, which is why I do not consider the Yucatán Peninsula to be an integral part of the Caribbean, and its history can be ignored.

Another notable peninsula is Florida. In the centuries that followed the exploratory expeditions of Juan Ponce de León (1513, 1521), Pánfilo de Narváez (1528) and Hernando de Soto (1539), the Spanish, French and British competed to colonise the territory, but the Spanish crown needed to keep the peninsula for the defence of Cuba, and succeeded in doing so in the 18th century. In 1763, it passed from Spain to the British Empire for 20 years, then back to the Spanish in 1784, and finally became part of the United States of America in 1822. Following the extinction of the Native American population, it was the colonising white soldiers and then settlers who determined the ethnic composition of Florida's early history, although the presence of black slaves can be traced as early as the 17th century. What is striking is that plantations based on the labour of large numbers of slaves appeared almost immediately under British rule, for example, Richard Oswald's sugar and indigo plantations employed over a hundred slaves. In British times, black slaves made up 65 per cent of the peninsula's population of about 17 300. This proportion represented something of an ethnic „revolution" compared to the years under Spanish rule, as blacks made up only 13 per cent of the total population at the start of British rule[8]. In the *antebellum* era, they made up about half of Florida's population, and only 3.6 percent of the white population were slave owners (Matrana 2009).

In the case of Florida, all three elements of belonging to the Caribbean were present, yet the peninsula could not be considered an integral part of the "American Mediterranean", as its annexation to the United States of America completely culturally erased its already unreliable colonial past, as the Spanish authorities saw Florida as a forward military base from which to control and threaten the southern British mainland colonies of South Carolina and then Georgia (Lévai 2020, 199) Spain's colonial past was not a dominant factor here, as South Carolina slave traders obtained slaves from Florida with the help of Indian confederations (Yamasee, Creek) in the southeastern United States. These Indian confederations also attacked the Spanish missions on the peninsula, so the Spanish tried to flee the enslaved Indians who had converted to Catholicism to Cuba and Mexico. As a consequence of the 'successful' slave trade of the Yamasees and the Creeks, by the early 18th century much of the peninsula was virtually depopulated (Lévai 2020, 253-254). For all these reasons, I do not consider the Florida peninsula to be an integral part of the Caribbean.

[8] Florida Memory, State Library and Archives of Florida, Photo Exhibits, Plantation Culture. https://www.floridamemory.com/learn/exhibits/photo_exhibits/plantations/plantations2.php.

It is clear from the above that we are faced with the opposite phenomenon in the Caribbean to that in the "European Mediterranean" in terms of the importance of the peninsulas. Here, it is not the peninsulas but the islands that have been the defining medium of the region's history and have played a major role in the cultural identity of the "American Mediterranean". The Caribbean Islands were the core areas of the discovery and colonisation of the New World, where the Spanish explorers first appeared and where the rivalries of the leading states of the early modern period were localised. In addition to Spain and the British Empire, France, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden tried their luck in the Caribbean, but only the Spanish and the British were able to play a dominant role. It could also be said that the "European Mediterranean", in the form of the Spanish Empire, penetrated the "American Mediterranean" and became a shaping force, i.e. the Iberian Peninsula, through the Spanish Caribbean archipelago, played a dominant role in the early colonial history of the "American Mediterranean". Spanish leadership in the region began to decline in the 18th century, when the British and French claimed a share of the wealth generated by plantation farming.

5. The Caribbean "internal border" issue

Another important issue is the problem of division within the region. A division similar to that in the European Mediterranean is also a feature of the American Mediterranean. The important linguistic, cultural and religious boundaries between the western and eastern Mediterranean basins became an increasingly tangible reality from Roman times, especially after the split of the Roman Empire (395), and the differences became more pronounced during the reign of the Emperor Justinian I (527-565). By the 6th century, the intellectual-religious-cultural divergence between the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West had reached such a degree that it led to the great schism in 1054. By the 6th century, the West had forgotten Greek and was alien to Eastern Christianity and sophisticated Byzantine culture. Byzantium, in turn, looked down on and regarded Westerners as barbarians. The Crusades only deepened the conflict between the two regions. The Roman-Byzantine divide has persisted in the region to this very day along the borderline between Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. And in the 7th and 8th centuries, a new religion, Islam, appeared in both halves of the European Mediterranean, and the region from the Iberian Peninsula to the Balkans was forced to live with it.

As I have already mentioned, Spykman has also explained the divisibility of the "American Mediterranean" into two parts, the "Western" and the "Eastern Mediterranean". Spykman included the Gulf of Mexico in the former and the Caribbean in the latter, but this approach was based primarily on geographic-national

security factors. However, as explained above, in my study I only analyse the Caribbean archipelago, which I consider to be the "American Mediterranean" par excellence. I do not consider the Gulf of Mexico region as an integral part of the Caribbean. The phenomenon of partition within the Caribbean archipelago has produced linguistic-religious and cultural diversity within the region due to the different colonial empires. In my view, a kind of internal boundary is formed by the maritime strip between the island of Puerto Rico, which closes the Greater Antilles, and the Virgin Islands. To the west of the line, in the Greater Antilles, are islands belonging to the Spanish colonial empire, the largest of which was Cuba. On the other side, in the Lesser Antilles, there was no single colonial power, but the Dutch, French, English, Danish and Swedish all shared the same territory, with the British dominating the region through their possession of the two largest sugar-producing islands, Jamaica and Barbados. Although Jamaica was geographically part of the Greater Antilles, it did not have close links with the Spanish-speaking islands of the sub-region, as it was a British interest. Within the Caribbean archipelago, therefore, there is a distinct and strong dividing line between the Spanish and English-speaking islands. This dividing line represents not only a linguistic-cultural but also a religious difference.

While the Spanish-speaking islands (Greater Antilles) have remained representative of Catholicism in the Caribbean to the present day, the Lesser Antilles islands are reinforcing Protestantism. Although surveys show that, overall, Protestants from each of the islands make up the largest religious community, the role of Protestantism in the sea of Catholicism is not decisive[9]. What is the reason for this significant difference in favour of Catholicism? The question is clearly closely linked to the size of the islands and the number of inhabitants. If we take today's data, the total population of the Lesser Antilles (around 6.5 million) is half that of Cuba alone (12.5 million), so the numerical superiority of the Greater Antilles is inescapable, as it was in the colonial era.

The Anglican Communion, for understandable historical reasons, had a well-established church organization in the Caribbean by the 1700s, but its activities were ineffective due to a shortage of priests, despite its efforts to take a firm stand against other religious groups, especially Catholics, which, in terms of numbers, was the key to its survival. Alongside the Anglicans, a religious group from Bohemia, known as

[9] Unfortunately, the most recent data on this topic date back to 2011, but the trend can be clearly discerned from the available figures, as there has been no radical change in the past nine years. Anguilla: Protestant 73.2%, Roman Catholic 6.8%; Antigua and Barbuda: Protestant 68.3%, Roman Catholic 8.2%; Barbados: Protestant 66.4%, Roman Catholic 3.8%; Saint Kitts and Nevis: Protestant 74.4%, Roman Catholic 6.7%; Trinidad and Tobago: Protestant 32.1%, Roman Catholic 21.6%; Virgin Islands: Protestant 59%, Roman Catholic 34%. Source of data: *CIA. The World Factbook*. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/401.html.

Unitas Fratrum, with both Lutheran and Calvinist influences, appeared on the Danish-ruled Island of St Thomas in 1732. The religious community later settled on both Antigua and Jamaica. Methodists were also present, especially after 1786, when Thomas Coke spent four years in the region doing missionary work among the people of each island. The emergence of the Baptists in the British Isles in the 1780s was linked to George Liele, who settled in Jamaica and spread the religion to the Caribbean from there (Edmonds and González 2010, 70-84).

Cultural-religious diversity has proved to be a decisive factor in the identity of the inhabitants of the area. The Spanish-speaking islands have always considered themselves part of a larger regional entity, Latin America, and this America has never denied them because of their common linguistic and cultural traditions. The inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles were in a more difficult position because of the ethnic composition of the islands - the population in this region did not feel the cultural heritage of the former mainland - and tended to turn towards the African heritage, with Afro-Caribbean religions (*Santería, Voodoo, Candomble*) coming to the fore. Surveys by the *Pew Research Center* have shown that Afro-Caribbean religions are present not only in the Lesser Antilles, but also in the mainland Latin American countries, beyond the Spanish-speaking Caribbean Islands, which, as stated earlier, are part of Latin America in terms of identity, among both Catholic and Protestant believers. In each of these countries, there is a tendency to superstition, for example, about a third of the adult population believes in at least some superstitious practices, including the existence of the "evil eye", the ability of some people to harm others through curses or magic ("Religion…" 2014, 8-9).

It is clear from the above that both Mediterranean regions are characterised by a division, mainly based on linguistic, cultural and religious differences. In both areas, there is a division within Christianity, albeit in different forms, and in both Mediterranean areas, a new religion has emerged which has had a decisive influence on the history of the region. In the colonial era, the original African beliefs of the slaves were easily eclipsed, at least in a half-hearted form, but Christianity suffered permanent damage through the intertwined African cults. The internal boundary is perhaps more pronounced in the case of the American Mediterranean, in that the Caribbean identity of the Spanish-speaking islands of the Greater Antilles did not develop over the centuries, as they always felt themselves to belong to a larger regional entity, Latin America, and this sense of identity was reasserted for them by Latin America. On the other side of the internal borderline is the group of English-speaking small Caribbean Islands, which felt no real sense of belonging with the Greater Antillean sub-region of different languages, religions and cultures, and also wanted to distance themselves from the material country. The common African roots, the Afro-Caribbean religions, provided the opportunity to reinforce this distance. The religions of the former mother countries have remained on the surface, but Catholicism is in decline here, as in Latin America in general. Some Catholic

believers are openly turning away from their original religion, while others formally retain it but are more involved in spiritual life as followers of Afro-Caribbean religions.

6. Conclusion

In my work, I have presented the emergence of the concept of the "American Mediterranean", attempted to draw the boundaries of its geographical and cultural framework, and compared the two regions in terms of their essential features. I have shown that there are a number of common and divergent features between the two "Mediterraneans".

The "American Mediterranean" is characterised by the fact that, unlike its European counterpart, the territories of the major peninsulas –the Yucatan Peninsula and Florida– are excluded from its sphere of interest, and the chain of islands therefore takes over the role of the European peninsulas. The Caribbean was the early focus of the European powers' explorations and conquests in the New World, and the struggle between these powers for sovereignty over the islands continued until the first half of the 18th century. Although the Spaniards were not successfully ousted from the area, many islands had to give way to Dutch, French and, above all, British expansion. Nevertheless, the successful retention of the Greater Antilles for many centuries ensured that Spain retained its leading role in the Caribbean.

The division of the "European Mediterranean", based on ancient cultures, can be translated into the Spanish-English division of the "American Mediterranean". The linguistic-cultural divide is also a religious divide. In the "European Mediterranean", Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity are present, while in the "American Mediterranean", certain strands of Catholicism and Protestantism are present. In both regions, there has been a recent and lasting colonisation of a new religion: in the "European Mediterranean", Islam has taken over, leading to the partial and temporary annexation of the major peninsulas (Iberian Peninsula, Apennine Peninsula, Balkan Peninsula) and the complete annexation of North Africa. In the "American Mediterranean", the persistence of cults of African origin influenced Christianity and gave rise to a particular religious syncretism (*Santería, Voodoo, Candomble*).

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