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Born from a series of seminars and colloquia held between 2014 and 2016, elhariry and Talbayev’s edited collection grapples with the state – and the rhetoric – of crisis in Mediterranean modernity. The volume argues for the dismantling of received temporal and historical divisions, and for the deployment of the Mediterranean as a critical concept built on the contingent, temporary, and ever-changing realities of the Sea. The contributors’ work builds especially on landmark texts from Franco Cassano (Southern Thought, 2012), Iain Chambers Mediterranean Crossings, 2008), and Predrag Matvejevic (Mediterranean—A Cultural Landscape, 1999), who have called our attention to the Mediterranean’s evolving crises and theoretical fecundity. Contributions range from literary studies, musicology, and art historical analyses to ethnographic research and philosophy; the stimulating blend is remarkable for its consistent adherence to the volume’s overarching goal of disrupting Mediterranean temporalities with new critical perspectives. Unfortunately, in both its framing and many of the individual contributions Critically Mediterranean is weakened by an overreliance on neologisms and abstruse jargon which render the material inaccessible; the reader frequently struggles to derive meaning from terms set in italics or quotation marks to unclear purpose. Still, the essays taken as a whole add to the case for scholars’ renewed grappling with the Mediterranean as a heuristic tool in the modern and contemporary periods during which, as the authors amply demonstrate, the Mediterranean has been too quickly dismissed as a hermeneutic structure. Contributions from Hakim Abderrezak, Naor Ben-Yehoyada, Claudio Fogu, and Michal Raizen stand out for the clarity of their Mediterranean visions.
# Table of Contents

1. Critically Mediterranean: An Introduction: 1  
   • yasser elhariry and Edwige Talmalet Talbayev

## Part I. Mediterranean Modernities: Immanance and Dynamics: 23

2. Heidegger as Mediterraneanist: 25  
   • Annika Döring and Peregrine Horden
3. Lawrence Durrell’s Mediterranean Shores: Tropisms of a Receding Line: 45  
   • Isabelle Keller
4. The Text without Rupture: Jewish Itineraries of Mourning in Edmond El Maleh’s Mediterranean: 65  
   • Michal Raizen
5. Mediterranean Modernisms: The Case of Cypriot Artist Christoforos Savva: 77

## Part II.: Mediterranean Temporalities: Remembrance, Haunting, Slow Time, Anachronism: 111

6. Old Anxieties in New Skins: The Project of al-Andalus and Nostalgic Dwelling in the New Mediterranean: 113  
   • Jonathan H. Shannon
   • Norbert Bugeja
8. The Mediterranean *Seametery* and *Cementery* in Leïla Kilani’s and Tariq Teguia’s Filmic Works: 147  
   • Hakim Abderrezak
   • John Baldacchino

## Part III. Deployments: 179

10. We Have Made the Mediterranean; Now We Must Make Mediterraneans: 181  
    • Claudio Fogu
11. Etel Adnan’s Transcolonial Mediterranean: 199  
    • Olivia C. Harrison
12. Heritage Washed Ashore: Underwater Archaeology and Regionalist Imaginaries in the Central Mediterranean: 217  
    • Naor Ben-Yehoyada
13. Mediterranean Lyric: 241  
    • yasser elhariry
    • Edwige Tamalet Talbayev

Index: 273