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Geography & Travel Physical Geography of Water Oceans & Seas Ask the Chatbot a Question What is the Mediterranean Sea? Where is the Mediterranean Sea located? How did the Mediterranean Sea get its name? What is the climate like around the Mediterranean Sea? Why is the Mediterranean Sea important for trade and travel? What unique ecosystems and marine life are found in the Mediterranean Sea? How has human activity impacted the Mediterranean Sea? What are some major historical events associated with the Mediterranean region? Mediterranean Sea, an intercontinental sea that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean on the west to Asia on the east and separates Europe from Africa. It has often been called the incubator of Western civilization. This ancient “sea between the lands” occupies a deep, elongated, and almost landlocked irregular depression lying between latitudes 30° and 46° N and longitudes 5°50′ W and 36° E. Its west-east extent—from the Strait of Gibraltar between Spain and Morocco to the shores of the Gulf of Iskenderun on the southwestern coast of Turkey—is approximately 2,500 miles (4,000 km), and its average north-south extent, between Croatia’s southernmost shores and Libya, is about 500 miles (800 km). The Mediterranean Sea, including the Sea of Marmara, occupies an area of approximately 970,000 square miles (2,510,000 square km).The western extremity of the Mediterranean Sea connects with the Atlantic Ocean by the narrow and shallow channel of the Strait of Gibraltar, which is roughly 8 miles (13 km) wide at its narrowest point; and the depth of the sill, or submarine ridge separating the Atlantic from the Alborán Sea, is about 1,050 feet (320 metres). To the northeast the Mediterranean is connected with the Black Sea through the Dardanelles (with a sill depth of 230 feet [70 metres]), the Sea of Marmara, and the strait of the Bosporus (sill depth of about 300 feet [90 metres]). To the southeast it is connected with the Red Sea by the Suez Canal. Composite satellite image of the Mediterranean Sea A point between Minorca and Barcelona The Mediterranean Sea, a sea of the Atlantic Ocean, lies between the continents of Eurasia and Africa enclosed almost completely by land. It is bounded on the north by Europe, on the south by Africa, and on the east by Asia; and it joins with the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar only eight miles (13 kilometers) wide and 1,050 feet (320 meters) deep. The surface area of the Mediterranean Sea is approximately 965,000 square miles (2.5 million square kilometers). In oceanography, the Mediterranean Sea is sometimes called the Eurafrican Mediterranean Sea or the European Mediterranean Sea, to distinguish it from mediterranean seas elsewhere. To the northeast the Mediterranean Sea is connected with the Black Sea through the Dardanelles (with a sill depth of 230 feet), the Sea of Marmara, which is often considered to be part of the Mediterranean Sea, and the strait of the Bosporus (sill depth of about three hundred feet). To the southeast it is connected with the Red Sea by the man-made Suez Canal. Historically, the warm and temperate climate of the Mediterranean Sea region allowed numerous ancient peoples to establish themselves and flourish, developing traditions of philosophy, art, literature, and medicine which lie at the roots of modern Western and Middle Eastern culture. For the entire region, the Sea itself was the most important route for merchants and travelers of ancient times, allowing for trade and cultural exchange between emergent peoples of the region—the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Semitic, Persian, Phoenician, Carthaginian, Greek and Roman cultures. Knowledge of the history of the Mediterranean is crucial to understanding the origins and development of many modern societies. In the past few centuries, human activity has brought about irreversible changes in the ecology and geology of the Mediterranean Sea. Bordered by more than 20 countries and territories depending on it as a crucial part of their economy, the Sea is strategically positioned to serve as a test ground for developing strategies of multinational collaboration in exploiting and managing a shared aquatic resource. Name The term Mediterranean derives from the Latin mediterraneus, “inland” (medius, “middle” + terra, “land, earth”). To the ancient Romans, the Mediterranean was the center of the Earth as they knew it. The Mediterranean Sea has been known by a number of alternative names throughout human history. It was, for example, commonly called Mare Nostrum (Latin, “Our Sea”), and occasionally Mare Internum by the Romans (Sallust, Jug. 17). The Greeks named it Mesogeios (Μεσόγειος), meaning inland, interior (μεσο, “middle” + γαιος, “land, earth”).[1] In the Old Testament, on the west coast of the Holy Land, and therefore behind a person facing the east, it is called the "Hinder Sea," sometimes translated as "Western Sea," (Deut. 6:24; Joel 2:20), and also the "Sea of the Philistines" (Exod. 12:81), because that people occupied a large portion of its shores near the Israelites. Mostly, however, it was the "Great Sea" (Num. 34:6, 7; Josh. 1:4, 9:1, 15:47; Ezek. 47:10, 15, 20), or simply "The Sea" (1 Kings 5:9). In Hebrew, it is called HaYam HaTikhon (הַיָּם הַתִּיכוֹן), "the middle sea," a literal adaptation of the German equivalent Mittelmeer. In Turkish, it is Akdeniz, "the white sea." In Arabic, it is Al-Baḥr Al-Abyad Al-Muttawasit (البحر الأبيض المتوسط), "the middle white sea." Geography and Climate Large islands in the Mediterranean include Cyprus, Crete, Euboea, Rhodes, Lesbos, Chios, Kefalonia and Corfu in the eastern Mediterranean; Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily, and Malta in the central Mediterranean; and Ibiza, Majorca and Minorca (the Balearic Islands) in the western Mediterranean. The Mediterranean climate is generally one of wet winters and hot, dry summers. Crops of the region include olives, grapes, oranges, tangerines, and cork. Oceanography The character of the Mediterranean Sea is determined by the fact that it is nearly landlocked. As a result of the narrow connection with the Atlantic Ocean, tides are very limited. The Mediterranean is characterized by its imposing deep blue color, especially around the Greek islands. Salinity and currents Predominant currents for June Evaporation greatly exceeds precipitation and river runoff in the Mediterranean, affecting the water circulation within the basin.[2] The quantity of fresh water flowing into the Mediterranean from rivers is only one-third of the amount lost through evaporation. Evaporation is especially high in its eastern half, causing the water level to decrease and salinity to increase eastward.[3] This imbalance causes a pressure gradient which draws relatively cool, low-salinity water from the Atlantic across the basin; it warms and becomes saltier as it travels east, then sinks in the region of the Levant and circulates westward, to spill over the Strait of Gibraltar.[4] Thus, seawater flow is eastward in the strait's surface waters, and westward below; once in the open ocean, this chemically-distinct "Mediterranean Intermediate Water" can persist thousands of kilometers away from its source.[5] Salinity in the surface waters of the Mediterranean is about 38 parts per thousand, except in the area closest to the Atlantic, and approaches 40 parts per thousand in the eastern Mediterranean during the summer. Salinity of the deep water is about 38.4 parts per thousand. The Mediterranean has three layers of water masses; a surface layer, an intermediate layer, and a deep layer that sinks to the bottom. Measurements of the rate at which the deep layer forms and sinks, and studies of heat and water exchange in the Mediterranean provide useful models for understanding the impact of global climactic change on the world’s oceans. Water on the surface of the Mediterranean circulates in separate counterclockwise movements in each of the two basins. The complexity of the northern coastline and the numerous islands cause many eddies and local currents. Tides, although their range is significant only in the Gulf of Gabes and the northern Adriatic, complicate the currents in narrow channels such as the Strait of Messina. Water temperature Areas of the Mediterranean closer to the equator are hotter in temperature. The Gulf of Sidra, off the coast of Libya, has the highest water temperatures of about 88 °F (31°C) in August, followed by the Gulf of Iskenderun with 86°F (30°C). The extreme north of the Adriatic has the lowest surface temperatures; the mean temperature in February falls to 41°F (5°C) in the Gulf of Trieste, and ice occasionally forms in winter. Bordering Countries A satellite image taken from the side of the Strait of Gibraltar. At right, Africa; at left, Europe Twenty-one modern states have a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea. They are: Europe (from west to east): Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, the island state of Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece Asia (from north to south): Turkey, Syria, the island Republic of Cyprus, Lebanon and Israel Africa (from east to west): Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco Several other territories also border the Mediterranean Sea (from west to east): The Crown colony of Gibraltar (United Kingdom) The Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and nearby islands The autonomous monastic state of Mount Athos The sovereign base area of Akrotiri and Dhekelia The Gaza Strip (governed by the Palestinian National Authority) Macedonia, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, and the Vatican, although they do not border the sea, are often considered Mediterranean countries in a wider sense due to their Mediterranean climate, fauna and flora, and their cultural affinity with other Mediterranean countries. Subdivisions Mediterranian coast in Israel A view across the Strait of Gibraltar The Mediterranean Sea is subdivided into a number of smaller seas, each with its own designation (from west to east): the Alboran Sea, between Spain and Morocco, the Balearic Sea, between mainland Spain and its Balearic Islands, the Ligurian Sea between Corsica and Liguria (Italy), the Tyrrhenian Sea enclosed by Sardinia, Italian peninsula and Sicily, the Adriatic Sea between the Italian peninsula and the coasts of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro and Albania the Ionian Sea between Italy, Greece, and Albania, the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey, with the Thracian Sea in its north, the Myrtoan Sea between the Cyclades and the Peloponnesos, the Sea of Crete north of Crete the Libyan Sea south of Crete, between the island and Libya the Sea of Marmara between the Aegean and Black Seas. the Cilician Sea between Turkey and Cyprus Many of these smaller seas feature in local myth and folklore and derive their names from these associations. In addition to the seas, a number of gulfs and straits are also recognized: the Saint George Bay in Beirut, Lebanon the Gulf of Corinth, an enclosed sea between the Ionian Sea and the Corinth Canal the Saronic Gulf, the gulf of Athens, between the Corinth Canal and the Mirtoan Sea the Thermaic Gulf, the gulf of Thessaloniki, located in the northern Greek region of Macedonia the Kvarner Gulf, Croatia the Gulf of Lion, south of France the Gulf of Valencia, east of Spain the Strait of Messina, between Sicily and the toe of Italy the Gulf of Taranto, southern Italy, the Strait of Otranto, between Italy and Albania the Gulf of Haifa, between Haifa and Akko, Israel the Gulf of Sidra, between Tunisia and Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) the Strait of Sicily, between Sicily and Tunisia the Corsica Channel, between Corsica and Italy the Strait of Bonifacio, between Sardinia and Corsica the Gulf of İskenderun, between İskenderun and Adana (Turkey) the Gulf of Antalya, between west and east shores of Antalya (Turkey) the Gulf of Kotor, on the coast of Montenegro Geology The geology of the Mediterranean is complex, involving the break-up and then collision of the African and Eurasian tectonic plates, and the Messinian Salinity Crisis in the late Miocene when the Mediterranean dried up. The Mediterranean Sea has an average depth of 4,920 feet (1,500 meters) and the deepest recorded point is 17,280 feet (5,267 meters) in the Calypso Deep in the Ionian Sea. The coastline extends for 27,600 miles (46,000 kilometers). A shallow submarine ridge underlying the Strait of Sicily, which separates the island of Sicily and the coast of Tunisia, divides the sea in two main subregions, the Western Mediterranean and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Western Mediterranean covers an area of about 328,100 square miles (850,000 square kilometers) and the Eastern Mediterranean about 637,000 square miles (1.65 million square kilometers). The western section has three submarine basins, the Alborán, the Algerian, and the Tyrrhenian basins (from west to east), divided from one another by submerged ridges. The eastern section is made up of the Ionian Basin (northwest of which is the Adriatic Sea) and the Levantine Basin (northwest of which is the Aegean Sea). Geodynamic history The Mediterranean was once thought to be the remnant of the Tethys Ocean. Studies conducted since the 1970s, however, have suggested that the present Mediterranean seafloor is not part of the older (200 million years) Tethys floor. It is now known to be a structurally younger ocean basin (44 million years) known as Neotethys. Neotethys formed during the Late Triassic and Early Jurassic rifting of the African and Eurasian plates. The geodynamic evolution of the Mediterranean Sea was driven by the convergence of European and African plates. Geologic data suggests that there are at least six main areas where the Africa and Eurasian plates collide, resulting in volcanism, mountain building, and land submergence. The Mediterranean also hosts wide extensional basins and migrating tectonic arcs, in response to its land-locked configuration. Eastern Mediterranean: in middle Miocene times roughly 20 million years ago, the collision between the Arabian microplate and Eurasia led to the separation between the Tethys and the Indian Ocean. This process brought about profound changes in the oceanic circulation patterns, which shifted global climates toward colder conditions. Since that collision, the Hellenic Arc, which has a land-locked configuration, underwent a widespread extension. During the Pleistocene, the Hellenic Arc experienced a rapid rotation phase, with a counterclockwise component in its eastern portion and a clockwise trend in the western segment. Central Mediterranean: over the last thirty million years, trench migration and the opening of back arcs caused the formation of the small oceanic basins of the central Mediterranean. This phase was characterized by the counter-clockwise rotation of the Corsica-Sardinia block, which lasted until the Langhian (c. 16 million years ago), and was followed by a slab detachment along the northern African margin. Subsequently, a shift of this active extensional deformation led to the opening of the Tyrrenian basin. Western Mediterranean: Since the Mesozoic, during convergence between Africa and Iberia in the western Mediterranean developed the Betic-Rif mountain belts. The tectonic model for its evolution includes rapid movement of the Alboran microplate subduction zone and radial extensional collapse, caused by convective removal of lithospheric mantle. The development of these intramontane Betic and Rif basins led to the onset of two marine gateways which were progressively closed during the late Miocene by an interplay of tectonic and glacio-eustatic processes. Records of Paleoclimatic variations Because of its peculiar latitudinal position and its land-locked configuration, the Mediterranean is especially sensitive to astronomically-induced climatic variations, which are well documented in its sedimentary record. During dry periods, eolian dust blown from the Sahara Desert is deposited in the Mediterranean, while deposits of detrital mud washed in by rivers prevail during wet periods. Because of this, geological studies of the layers of rock under the Mediterranean which bear marine sapropel (dark-colored sediments containing organic matter) provide us with high-resolution climatic information for the time periods when those sediments were deposited. These data have been employed in reconstructing astronomically calibrated time scales for the last nine million years of Earth’s history. The exceptional accuracy of these paleoclimatic records has improved our knowledge on the Earth’s orbital variations in the past. Paleoenvironmental Analysis The semi-enclosed configuration of the Mediterranean Sea makes the oceanic gateways critical in controlling circulation and environmental evolution. Water circulation patterns are driven by a number of interactive factors, such as climate and the sea floor terrain, which can lead to precipitation of evaporites. During late Miocene times, a so-called “Messinian Salinity Crisis” occurred, which was triggered by the closure of the Atlantic gateway. Evaporites accumulated in the Red Sea Basin (late Miocene), in the Carpattian foredeep (middle Miocene) and in the whole Mediterranean area (Messinian). An accurate age estimate of the Messinian Salinity Crisis (5.96 million years ago) has recently been astronomically achieved; furthermore, this event seems to have occurred synchronously. The Messinian Salinity Crisis is presumed to have been triggered by tectonic action; however an astronomical influence (eccentricity) might also have been involved. In the Mediterranean basin, diatomites are regularly found underneath the evaporitic deposits, suggesting a connection between their geneses. The present-day Atlantic gateway, the Strait of Gibraltar, originated in the early Pliocene. In the past there were two other connections between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, the Betic Corridor (southern Spain) and the Rifian Corridor (northern Morocco). The former closed during Tortonian times, provoking a “Tortonian Salinity Crisis” long before the before the Messinian Salinity Crisis. The Rifian Corridor closed about six million years ago, allowing exchanges of mammal species between Africa and Europe. Ecology The drying of the sea during the Messinian Salinity Crisis eliminated most of the marine life of that period, and the current marine biota of the Mediterranean are derived primarily from the Atlantic Ocean. The North Atlantic is considerably colder and more nutrient-rich than the Mediterranean, and the marine life of the Mediterranean has had to adapt to its differing conditions in the five million years since the basin was reflooded. Threats to the ecology of the Mediterranean In the last few centuries, humankind has altered Mediterranean geology by digging canals, re-routing rivers and building structures all along the coastlines, exacerbating and changing erosional patterns. Historically, large seasonal inflows from the Nile, which reduced the salinity of coastal waters, were part of an essential cycle influencing the hydrology and the productivity of the fisheries of the southeastern part of the Mediterranean. The construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1970 put an end to this seasonal fluctuation of the Nile's discharge into the Mediterranean. Mismanagement of beaches and overuse of the sea's natural and marine resources continue to be a problem. Industrial pollution and chemical pollution from boats is another threat. Recently the amount of raw sewage being dumped directly into the Mediterranean every year has reached over one million tons. Many marine species have almost disappeared, such as the Mediterranean monk seal, which has been identified as one of the top ten endangered species in the world. Migration of Invasive Species The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 created the first saltwater passage between the Mediterranean and Red seas. The Red Sea is higher than the Eastern Mediterranean, so the canal serves as a tidal strait that pours Red Sea water into the Mediterranean. The Bitter Lakes, which are hypersaline natural lakes that form part of the canal, blocked the migration of Red Sea species into the Mediterranean for many decades, but as the salinity of the lakes gradually equalized with that of the Red Sea, the barrier to migration was removed, and plants and animals from the Red Sea have begun to colonize the eastern Mediterranean. The Red Sea is generally saltier and more nutrient-poor than the Atlantic, so the Red Sea species have advantages over Atlantic species in the salty and nutrient-poor Eastern Mediterranean. Accordingly, Red Sea species invade the Mediterranean biota, and not vice versa; this phenomenon is known as the Lessepsian migration (after Ferdinand de Lesseps, the French engineer) or Erythrean invasion. The construction of the Aswan High Dam across the Nile River in the 1960s reduced the inflow of freshwater and nutrient-rich silt from the Nile into the eastern Mediterranean, making conditions there even more like the Red Sea, and worsening the impact of the invasive species. Species from the Red Sea that have invaded the Mediterranean through the Suez canal have become a major harmful component of the Mediterranean ecosystem endangering many local and endemic Mediterranean species. About 300 species native to the Red Sea have already been identified in the Mediterranean Sea, and there are probably others yet unidentified. In recent years, the Egyptian government's announcement of its intentions to deepen and widen the canal, have raised concerns from marine biologists, fearing that this will worsen the invasion of Red Sea species into the Mediterranean by facilitating the crossing of the canal for additional species.[6] Notes ↑ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. A Greek-English Lexicon. “μεσόγαιος.”. Retrieved August 21, 2007. ↑ Paul R. Pinet. Invitation to Oceanography. (Saint Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1996, ISBN 0314063390), 202. ↑ Pinet, 206. ↑ Pinet, 206-207. ↑ Pinet, 207. ↑ B. S. Galil and A. Zenetos, “A sea change: exotics in the eastern Mediterranean Sea,” in E. Leppäkoski, et al., Invasive Aquatic Species of Europe: Distribution, Impacts and Management. (2002), 325-336. Galil, B. S., and A. Zenetos, “A sea change: exotics in the eastern Mediterranean Sea,” in E. Leppäkoski, et al., eds., Invasive Aquatic Species of Europe: Distribution, Impacts and Management. Springer, 2002. ISBN 1402008376 Gedacht, Daniel C. 2004. Land and Resources of Ancient Rome. (Primary Sources of Ancient Civilizations). New York: PowerKids Press. ISBN 0823967751 Krasheninnikov, Valeriĭ Arkadevich, and John Kendrick Hall. 2005. Geological framework of the Levant. Jerusalem: Historical Productions-Hall. ISBN 9657297028 Leier, Manfred. 2001. World Atlas of the Oceans: With the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans. Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books U.S. ISBN 1552095851 Levi, Peter. 1991. Atlas of the Greek World. New York: Facts on File. ISBN 0871964481 Norwich, John Julius. 1989. Byzantium. New York: Knopf. ISBN 0394537785 Norwich, John Julius. 2006. The Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean. New York: Doubleday. ISBN 0385510233 O'Shea, Stephen. 2006. Sea of Faith: Islam and Christianity in the Medieval Mediterranean World. New York: Walker. ISBN 0802714986 Pinet, Paul R. Invitation to Oceanography. Saint Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1996, ISBN 0314063390 Pryor, John H. 1988. Geography, Technology, and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0521344247 Symposium on the Mediterranean Sea, and Daniel J. Stanley. 1973. The Mediterranean Sea; A natural Sedimentation Laboratory. Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross. ISBN 0879330104 Westbrook, Graham K., and T. J. Reston. 2002. “The Accretionary Complex of the Mediterranean Ridge: Tectonics, Fluid Flow and the Formation of Brine Lakes.” Marine Geology 186: 1-2. Amsterdam: Elsevier. Vita-Finzi, Claudio. 1969. The Mediterranean Valleys: Geological Changes in Historical Times. London: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0521073553 The Mediterranean Sea, a vast body of water that has long been a cradle of human civilization, is bordered by three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Spanning approximately 2.5 million square kilometres, it connects to the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar and is renowned for its rich history, diverse cultures, and significant ecological importance. The sea has served as a vital conduit for trade, cultural exchange, and migration for millennia, shaping the destinies of the nations that line its shores. From the ancient Phoenicians and Greeks to the Romans and beyond, the Mediterranean has been a stage for human endeavour, exploration, and conflict. The Mediterranean is not merely a geographical feature; it is a complex tapestry of interwoven histories and cultures. Its waters have witnessed the rise and fall of empires, the spread of religions, and the flourishing of arts and sciences. Today, it remains a focal point for geopolitical interests, environmental concerns, and economic activities. As we delve deeper into the Mediterranean’s geography, climate, biodiversity, human impact, and cultural significance, we uncover the intricate relationships that define this remarkable sea. Summary The Mediterranean Sea is a large body of water surrounded by Europe, Asia, and Africa, and is known for its rich history and diverse cultures. The Mediterranean Sea has a diverse geography and climate, with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters, making it a popular tourist destination. The Mediterranean Sea is home to a wide variety of marine life, including over 7000 species of plants and animals, making it one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Human activities such as overfishing, pollution, and coastal development have had a significant impact on the Mediterranean Sea, threatening its delicate ecosystems. The Mediterranean Sea plays a crucial role in trade and tourism, with many major ports and popular holiday destinations located along its shores. Geography and Climate of the Mediterranean Sea The geographical features of the Mediterranean Sea are as diverse as its cultural heritage. The sea is characterised by its numerous islands, peninsulas, and coastal regions that vary dramatically in topography. Major islands such as Sicily, Sardinia, and Crete are not only significant in size but also in their historical and cultural contributions to the Mediterranean narrative. The coastline is punctuated by rugged cliffs, sandy beaches, and fertile plains, creating a mosaic of habitats that support a wide range of flora and fauna. The climate of the Mediterranean region is predominantly characterised by a hot-summer Mediterranean climate (Csa), which is typified by dry summers and mild, wet winters. This climatic pattern is influenced by various factors including latitude, altitude, and proximity to land masses. The summer months see temperatures soar, often exceeding 30 degrees Celsius in many coastal areas, while winters are generally mild with average temperatures ranging from 10 to 15 degrees Celsius. This climate not only supports a rich agricultural landscape but also attracts millions of tourists each year seeking sun-soaked holidays along its picturesque shores. Biodiversity and Ecosystems of the Mediterranean Sea The Mediterranean Sea is home to an astonishing array of biodiversity, boasting over 17,000 marine species, many of which are endemic to the region. This rich biodiversity is supported by various ecosystems including coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and deep-sea habitats. The Posidonia oceanica seagrass meadows are particularly noteworthy; they play a crucial role in maintaining water quality and providing habitat for numerous marine organisms. These meadows are often referred to as the “lungs of the sea” due to their ability to produce oxygen and sequester carbon dioxide. In addition to seagrasses, the Mediterranean hosts a variety of fish species such as the European anchovy (Engraulis encrasicolus), sardines (Sardina pilchardus), and larger predators like the bluefin tuna (Thunnus thynnus). The region is also known for its marine mammals, including dolphins and the endangered monk seal (Monachus monachus). However, this rich tapestry of life faces significant threats from overfishing, pollution, and climate change. The delicate balance of these ecosystems is increasingly under pressure as human activities continue to encroach upon their habitats. Human Activities and Impact on the Mediterranean Sea Human activities have profoundly impacted the Mediterranean Sea over centuries. The region has been a hub for maritime trade since antiquity, with bustling ports facilitating the exchange of goods across continents. However, this economic activity has come at a cost. Overfishing has led to significant declines in fish populations, disrupting marine food webs and threatening the livelihoods of local fishing communities. The bluefin tuna, once abundant in these waters, has seen its numbers plummet due to unsustainable fishing practices driven by high market demand. Pollution is another critical issue facing the Mediterranean Sea. Urbanisation along its coastlines has resulted in increased runoff of pollutants into the water. Industrial waste, agricultural runoff containing pesticides and fertilisers, and untreated sewage discharge contribute to deteriorating water quality. The presence of microplastics has become particularly alarming; studies have shown that these tiny particles are now ubiquitous in marine environments, posing risks to marine life and potentially entering the human food chain through seafood consumption. The cumulative effects of these activities threaten not only marine biodiversity but also the health of coastal communities reliant on these ecosystems. Importance of the Mediterranean Sea for Trade and Tourism The Mediterranean Sea plays an indispensable role in global trade and tourism. Its strategic location has made it a vital maritime route for shipping goods between Europe, Asia, and Africa. Major ports such as Barcelona, Marseille, and Genoa serve as critical nodes in international trade networks. The sea facilitates the transport of commodities ranging from oil and gas to agricultural products and manufactured goods. This economic activity is essential for the economies of many Mediterranean countries, providing jobs and supporting local industries. Tourism is another cornerstone of the Mediterranean economy. The region attracts millions of visitors each year who flock to its sun-drenched beaches, historic cities, and cultural landmarks. Destinations like Venice, Athens, and Dubrovnik are renowned for their historical significance and architectural beauty. The tourism sector not only generates substantial revenue but also fosters cultural exchange among diverse populations. However, this influx of tourists can lead to environmental degradation if not managed sustainably. Balancing economic benefits with ecological preservation remains a critical challenge for policymakers in the region. Conservation Efforts and Challenges in the Mediterranean Sea In response to the myriad challenges facing the Mediterranean Sea, various conservation efforts have been initiated at both national and international levels. The Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution is one such framework aimed at reducing pollution and protecting marine biodiversity. This agreement encourages cooperation among Mediterranean countries to address environmental issues collectively. Additionally, numerous marine protected areas (MPAs) have been established to safeguard critical habitats and promote sustainable fishing practices. Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain. Enforcement of environmental regulations can be inconsistent across different countries due to varying levels of political will and resources. Moreover, climate change poses an existential threat to marine ecosystems; rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification are altering species distributions and disrupting traditional fishing patterns. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action among nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea as well as engagement with local communities to foster stewardship of marine resources. Cultural and Historical Significance of the Mediterranean Sea The cultural significance of the Mediterranean Sea cannot be overstated; it has been a source of inspiration for artists, writers, and philosophers throughout history. The sea has served as a backdrop for countless myths and legends—from Odysseus’s epic journey in Homer’s “Odyssey” to the tales of ancient mariners navigating its treacherous waters. The diverse cultures that have flourished along its shores have contributed to a rich tapestry of art, music, cuisine, and traditions that continue to influence contemporary society. Historically, the Mediterranean has been a melting pot of civilisations where ideas were exchanged freely across borders. The spread of agriculture from the Fertile Crescent into Europe occurred via this maritime route; similarly, philosophical ideas from ancient Greece permeated through Rome into other parts of Europe during the Renaissance. The sea has also been a site of conflict; battles fought over control of trade routes have shaped political boundaries and alliances throughout history. Today, this historical legacy continues to inform contemporary cultural identities within Mediterranean nations. Future Outlook for the Mediterranean Sea Looking ahead, the future of the Mediterranean Sea hinges on our ability to address pressing environmental challenges while fostering sustainable development. Climate change will undoubtedly continue to impact marine ecosystems; however, proactive measures can mitigate some effects if implemented promptly. Transitioning towards renewable energy sources can reduce reliance on fossil fuels that contribute to pollution while promoting sustainable tourism practices can help preserve natural resources. Furthermore, fostering international cooperation among Mediterranean countries will be crucial in addressing shared challenges such as overfishing and pollution control. Engaging local communities in conservation efforts can empower them to take ownership of their natural resources while ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed. As we navigate these complexities in pursuit of a sustainable future for the Mediterranean Sea, it is imperative that we recognise its intrinsic value—not only as an economic asset but also as a vital component of our shared cultural heritage and ecological well-being. FAQs What countries border the Mediterranean Sea? The Mediterranean Sea is bordered by 21 countries, including Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. What is the climate like around the Mediterranean Sea? The Mediterranean region has a Mediterranean climate, characterized by hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The climate is influenced by the sea, with coastal areas experiencing milder temperatures than inland regions. What are the major ports and cities around the Mediterranean Sea? Some of the major ports and cities around the Mediterranean Sea include Barcelona, Marseille, Genoa, Naples, Athens, Istanbul, Alexandria, Tunis, Algiers, and Valencia. These cities are important hubs for trade, tourism, and cultural exchange. What are the main economic activities in the Mediterranean region? The Mediterranean region is known for its diverse economic activities, including tourism, agriculture, fishing, shipping, and trade. The region is also rich in natural resources such as oil and gas, which contribute to its economic significance. What are some of the environmental challenges facing the Mediterranean Sea? The Mediterranean Sea faces several environmental challenges, including pollution, overfishing, habitat destruction, and climate change. These issues threaten the biodiversity and ecological balance of the region, prompting efforts to promote sustainable development and conservation. As sea temperatures in the Mediterranean continue to reach new record highs, scientists are offering ominous warnings of the severe climate issues that could be up ahead.What's happening?In a press release from Mercator Ocean International, marine heatwaves in the Mediterranean Sea have continued well through June. The organization operates the European Union's Copernicus Marine Service, which provides crucial information on the state of ocean conditions on a global scale.According to Mercator, June 2025 was the warmest June on record for the Mediterranean, with a mean surface temperature of just under 75 degrees Fahrenheit. The organization reports that 88% of the Mediterranean basin experienced above-average temperatures in June.But the high temperatures aren't a recent development. The entire first half of 2025 saw the highest surface temperatures recorded in history.As noted by Euronews, the peak temperature in June even managed to surpass the historic average temperature in the sea by a wide margin. On June 29, sea surface temperatures nearly hit 79 degrees, which is over 5 degrees warmer than average.Why is a marine heatwave in the Mediterranean Sea important?The Mediterranean Sea is particularly vulnerable to heatwaves due to its semi-enclosed nature and limited water exchange with the cooler Atlantic. However, this heatwave can have significant implications for marine ecosystems throughout the entire region.Watch now: Giant snails invading New York City?Kathryn Smith from the Marine Biological Association of the U.K. explained that continued record temperatures can lead to an increase in mortality rates of marine life, which may greatly disrupt fishing industries."Marine heatwaves of this magnitude in the Mediterranean Sea have had major effects on marine life," Smith told Euronews."In the past, we have seen impacts like mass mortalities of invertebrate species, die-offs of seagrass beds and disease outbreaks in mussel farms. It's likely that we'll see similar impacts from this event."Marine heatwaves can even intensify extreme weather events on land. Warmer sea temperatures can lead to increased evaporation, adding moisture to the atmosphere and potentially fueling extreme rainfall events.With more intense storms, coastal communities may become more vulnerable to catastrophic flooding.What's being done about the record-setting temps in the Mediterranean?Karina von Schuckmann, a senior advisor with Ocean Science for Policy at Mercator Ocean International, emphasized the importance of urgent action."The unfolding, wide-reaching heatwave in the western Mediterranean now demands close attention," Von Schuckmann said.One of the leading causes of warmer ocean temperatures is the excess heat trapped in the Earth's atmosphere due to increased gas emissions, with the ocean absorbing over 90% of this heat. This heat absorption leads to rising sea surface temperatures and contributes to other changes like sea level rise and shifts in ocean currents.To combat warmer ocean temperatures, many countries have taken action to reduce harmful carbon emissions. This includes transitioning to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and reducing deforestation.Join our free newsletter for good news and useful tips, and don't miss this cool list of easy ways to help yourself while helping the planet. Located between southern Europe and northern Africa, the Mediterranean Sea is one of the world’s most well-known bodies of water. Famed for its beautiful blue waters and ritzy resorts, the Mediterranean has been a tourist hot spot for centuries – but there’s more than meets the eye to this famous inland sea.If you’ve ever wanted to learn more about it, continue reading to discover the 30 most interesting facts about the Mediterranean Sea that you probably didn’t know about. Back when the Roman Empire was at its peak, the Mediterranean Sea was thought to be the center of the world – hence its original name combining the Latin words “medius” (middle), “terra” (land or earth), and “āneus” (having the nature of) to create “mediterraneus”, or “middle of the earth”. Before it was dubbed with its Latin title, the Mediterranean Sea had a few different names including simply “The Sea”, “The Great Sea”, “Our Sea”, “The Internal Sea”, and “The Sea Around Us”, among others. Historically, the Mediterranean has proved to be a place where civilizations could flourish – and many ancient people called this region home.Two of the most notable ancient civilizations were the Greek city states and the Phoenicians. These two groups colonized the Mediterranean extensively and developed lasting traditions of art, philosophy, literature, medicine, and much more. The Roman Empire was perhaps the most important ancient civilization. While there are many different countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea today, the sea and its entire border belonged solely to the Romans at the height of this ancient empire, and this lasted for several centuries! The Roman Empire is mostly known for its powerful domain and extensive political and social structure, but they often fail to receive the credit they deserve for some of their inventions. Thanks to innovations like central heating, heated floors, and indoor plumbing, life in Rome was pretty luxurious (if you could afford it, that is).Other inventions thought up by the Romans include newspapers, concrete, and sewer systems, among with many others. The Mediterranean Sea is located between southern Europe and Anatolia to the north, North Africa to the south, and the Levant to the east. If you ever need them, the exact coordinates of the Mediterranean Sea lie between 30° and 45° N latitudes and 6°W and 35°E longitudes. The coastline of the Mediterranean Sea stretches across 22 different countries and measures over 46,000km (around 29,000 miles). The countries are listed below and categorized by their position along the sea. The Northern Shore consists of: Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, and Turkey. The Eastern Shore includes: Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Egypt.The Southern Shore comprises: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.There are two independent island nations located inside of the Mediterranean Sea: Malta and CyprusThere are also a few territories with borders along the Mediterranean Sea, including:The British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar in southern SpainThe autonomous Spanish cities of Ceuta, Melilla, and the Plazas de Soberania (a series of minor Spanish territories that are actually closer to Africa than Europe)The Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia on Cyprus (British Overseas Territory)The Palestinian Gaza StripBesides the two independent island nations in the Mediterranean Sea (Malta and Cyprus) there are thousands of other islands, though the exact number is a bit of a mystery. Greece claims over 6,000, though only 227 of those are actually inhabited. It would be impossible to list all of the islands, but some of the largest in the Mediterranean Sea include: Rhodes, Crete, Cyprus, Kefalonia, Lesbos, Andros, Samos, Limnos, Corfu, Chios, and Euboea in the east Malta, Pog, Sicily, Hvar, Krk, Cres, Korcula, and Brac in the centerMenorca, Majorca, Ibiza, Corsica, and Sardinia to the west The geology of the Mediterranean Sea is quite a conundrum, and its inception dates back hundreds of millions of years. For most of human history, the Mediterranean Sea was thought to be the remnant of an older body of water, the Tethys Ocean.New studies from the 1960s suggest that the basin is actually much younger and is a result of tectonic movement and the convergence of the African and Eurasian plates during the Late Triassic and Early Jurassic periods. This movement covered the aforementioned Tethys Ocean and created massive mountain peaks and a new basin for what would eventually become the Mediterranean Sea.Due to its dry climate, the Mediterranean dried up completely and remained that way for nearly 1 million years. Scientists believe that the sea was eventually filled in less than two years by the Zanclean Flood, when the Atlantic Ocean first began to flow into the Mediterranean via the Strait of Gibraltar (5.3 million years ago). The pressure of this flood is thought to have been about a thousand times greater than the current flow of the Amazon River. While the current theory is widely accepted, there is no unanimous agreement regarding the basin of the Mediterranean Sea. Much of the topography of the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea was highly impacted by tectonic plate convergences. This is especially true in the northern regions, where high mountain peaks and steep rocky cliffs make up much of the landscape.The region is quite varied, however, and you’ll find the topography switches to a flatter coastline with desert terrain in other areas. The Mediterranean is known for its pleasing climate, but there are some unpredictable weather patterns in this region that you may not be aware of.When we speak about the Mediterranean Sea climate, we are referring solely to the coastal zones. Summer weather is what this area is known for, and hot temperatures, calm seas,

covers an area of approximately 2.54 million square kilometers; at its longest it is 3,800 kilometers, and at its widest it is 800 kilometers. To the west it is connected to the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar, to the east with the Black Sea through the Dardanelles Straits, and to the south, since 1869, when the Suez Canal was opened, to the Red Sea. It is a semi-closed sea with little input from pluvial waters (rainfall and rivers) and a high rate of evaporation; without the constant influx of Atlantic water it would have dried up a long time ago. Mediterranean currents are not strong, but are rather deep. During the summer months its waters are calm; around the equinoxes and during the winter months storms are common and can be strong. The effect of tides is minimal, and winds are fairly regular. Its major climatic characteristic is a high seasonal variability, with generally mild and wet winters and hot and dry summers. Until the advent of the steamship, long-distance navigation across the Mediterranean was mostly seasonal, whereas coastal navigation occurred throughout the year. The staples of its agricultural trade have not changed for millennia: grains, wine, citrus fruits, salt, and especially olive oil (which was used as foodstuff and in the soap and woolen industries).THE TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF TRADESince antiquity the Mediterranean region has been at the center of the political, economic, and cultural development of Europe. The existence of a peculiar "Mediterranean" civilization has been the object of a long and still unresolved debate initiated by the 1949 publication of Fernand Braudel's monumental The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. Except during the Roman Empire (first century b.c.e. to fourth century c.e.) the Mediterranean has always been politically and religiously fragmented. These divisions, within a limited geographical space, shaped a world in which issues of trade and politics have always been very closely interconnected. During the medieval and early modern period religious and ethnic minorities—Jews and Armenians, in particular—played an important role, acting as intermediaries between different cultures and facilitating trade.By the fifteenth century Spain and the Republic of Venice were the major commercial powers in the area. Spain controlled the western part of the Mediterranean, whilst Venice enjoyed a near-monopoly in procuring spices, sugar, silk, and other luxury Asian products for the European markets. During the sixteenth century European geographical expansion started to shift the center of the European economy away from the Mediterranean, favoring countries with an Atlantic coastline. The circumnavigation of Africa (1498) provided an alternative route to Asia, and disruptions in the land caravan trades that supplied the eastern Mediterranean emporia slowly changed the structures of global trade to the detriment of the Mediterranean. The influx of gold and silver from the Americas also transformed the financial structure of long-distance Mediterranean trade. A long crisis ensued, which led to a growing presence of non-Mediterranean ships in Mediterranean waters for the first time. English and Dutch naval technology (developed for oceanic trades) proved superior to local ones, especially after fire-power changed the nature of warfare. The Ottoman Empire widened its political and commercial influence in the southeastern Mediterranean, though almost exclusively Europeans handled its foreign trade. To counterbalance Venetian influence, the Ottoman rulers granted capitulations to the French (1569) and English (1581). Its very valuable internal trade was largely in the hands of minorities within the empire: Jews, Armenians, and Greeks in particular.During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Barbary States of northern Africa—tributaries of the Ottoman Empire—actively pursued a corsair war against Christian shipping. Christians retaliated, especially through the activities of the Knights of Malta and Saint Stephen (based in Leghorn). Corsair war disrupted trade and increased protection costs. Conflicts between Christians and Muslims also revived the Mediterranean slave trade.During the seventeenth century Smyrne (Izmir) became the main Mediterranean entrepôt of the Ottoman Empire. Through a policy of low tariffs and no transit dues, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany succeeded in attracting Jewish traders and foreign merchants in Leghorn (1593). The whole basin, however, was enveloped in a general economic crisis, consequence of the shift of the previous century. Grain shortages facilitated the penetration of Dutch shipping, carrying Baltic grain especially to Italian markets. By the end of the seventeenth century English, Dutch, and French (in this order) dominated Mediterranean trade.STRUCTURAL CHANGESThe eighteenth century saw Britain's maritime power growing in the Mediterranean, notwithstanding French opposition. The decline of all the traditional political and commercial powers of the area (Venice, the Ottoman Empire, and Spain) created an economic and political vacuum in the area, drawing in other European powers. The English obtained Gibraltar in the War of Spanish Succession (1701–1714). With the conquest of Hungary and Croatia, the center of the Austrian Empire moved to the southeast, and a free port was established in Trieste (1719) to take advantage of the terminal decline of Venice. The Russians invested in the rise of the Black Sea port of Odessa, thereby integrating Mediterranean trade with Russian internal trade. Military operations were always strictly connected with the protection of national trade interests. The French and English navies fought hard to keep the sea lanes opened for their merchant ships, and blockaded ports to cut off enemy trade.Anglo-French confrontation—militarily and commercially—continued in the nineteenth century, heavily disrupting regular traffic. Greek Ottoman subjects took advantage of this, widening the scope of their ship owning interests and building the basis of their current domination in tramp shipping. But the true winners were the English who came to dominate the Mediterranean trade, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), which provided a direct sea route to the Indian Ocean. This lowered significantly the cost of raw materials coming into Europe to feed its ever-growing industrialization.In the meantime, Western European states proceeded to colonize the southern shores of the Mediterranean, matching their commercial domination with a political one: France occupied parts of North Africa, and England large parts of the Middle East. After World War II (1939–1945) the Mediterranean regained its strategic importance, due to the newly discovered crude oil and natural gas deposits of North Africa and the Middle East. Trade and politics were once again closely intertwined in the decolonizing process. In 1956 Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, rejecting foreign control.The founding of the European Economic Community (1957), which later became the European Union (1993), transformed trade patterns in the Mediterranean. Membership in the European Union (EU) proved to be very advantageous, and its preferential commercial tariffs widened the gap between industrialized Europe and non-industrialized Africa and the Middle East. As a result, commercial relations between European and other Mediterranean countries declined, especially with northern and eastern European countries planning to join the EU. To address these problems, in 1995 a Euro-Mediterranean partnership was created between the fif-teen EU member states at that time (the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Greece, Great Britain) and twelve nonmember states, all bordering the Mediterranean (Turkey, Israel, Cyprus, Malta, Syria, Lebanon, Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco). Its goal is to work towards the creation of a free-trade agreement between its signatories.The Mediterranean today is, after the English Channel, the most trafficked sea route on the planet. Intra-Mediterranean sea borne trade represents only 20 percent of the total, as most of the traffic is transit trade. Hydrocarbons traffic is particularly heavy due to the sea's proximity to the world's largest oil and natural gas fields. Such heavy traffic is dangerous, and polluting goods is cause for constant concern for the coastal states, especially the ones which enjoy a large income from tourism.SEE ALSO Ali, Muhammad; Arms, Armaments; Blockades in War; Bonaparte, Napoleon; Bullion (Specie); Caravan Trade; Climate; Coffee; Cotton; Egypt; Empire, British; Empire, Dutch; Empire, French; Empire, Ottoman; Empire, Portuguese; Empire, Spanish; Ethnic Groups, Armenians; Ethnic Groups, Jews; Fairs; France; Genoa; Gold and Silver; Greece; Guilds; Imperialism; Italy;Marseilles;Mercantilism;Millets and Capitulations;Morocco;Nantes;Pasha, Isma'il;Petroleum;Philip II;Piracy;Portugal;Privateering;Protection Costs;Shipbuilding;Shipping Lanes;Ship Types;Slavery and the African Slave Trade;Smuggling;Spain;Spices and the Spice Trade;Suez Canal;Sugar, Molasses, and Rum;Textiles;United States;Venice;Wars;Wheat and Other Cereal Grains;Wine.BIBLIOGRAPHYAbulafia, David, ed. The Mediterranean in History. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003.Braudel, Fernand. The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. 2 volumes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.Carpentier, Jean, and Lebrun, François. Histoire de la Méditerranée (History of the Mediterranean). Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998.Pierros Filippos, Meunier Jacob, Abrams Stan. Bridges and Barriers: The European Union Mediterranean Policy, 1961–1998. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.Rapp, Richard T. "The Unmaking of the Mediterranean Trade Hegemony: International Trade Rivalry and the Commercial Revolution." Journal of Economic History 35, no. 3 (September 1975): 499–525.Wainwright, John, and Thornes, John B. Environmental Issues in the Mediterranean: Processes and Perspectives from the Past and Present. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.Maria Fusaro views updated May 23 2018The Mediterranean Sea has held huge economic importance for millennia. This virtually landlocked sea, bordered by three continents, has been a vital bridge for economic and cultural commerce over centuries. In the ancient period it gave rise to the world's first great civilizations, most notably the Phoenicians and the Minoans. In later periods it fostered major global developments such as the rise and dissemination of Christianity and Islam. While following the Middle Ages the Mediterranean went into decline, largely as the result of the so-called Age of Discovery and Europe's new orientation toward the Americas, it remained critical to the imperial regimes of the Venetians, Ottomans, and Habsburgs. In the early twenty-first century, following the initiation in the 1990s of the Barcelona Process, it has regained importance as a critical cultural and economic intersection between Europe, Africa, and Asia.States along the Mediterranean's shores in the early twenty-first century include Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Two further states—Cyprus and Malta—are islands within it. Most of these polities were shaped by the nineteenth-century transition from Ottoman regional dominance to the establishment of separate nation states in the area. Traditionally, the Mediterranean Sea has had a unifying, rather than a dividing effect, and has served far more as a conduit for communication and cultural diffusion than as a boundary between different geographic regions. This unity notwithstanding, the region has over the course of millennia been a site of intense international and regional competition and warfare. The events of the "long nineteenth century" are a case in point.At the time of the French Revolution the Mediterranean was divided up largely between the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Venetian Republic; by the end of World War II none of these empires existed. The most dramatic changes of fortune during the period were dealt to the Ottomans and to the Venetian Republic; struggles within the Mediterranean were the direct cause of the latter's decline, and a key component of the Ottoman Empire's ultimate demise.During the French Revolutionary period and on into the nineteenth century, the Russians, French, and British were the primary contenders for control in the region. Following the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji (1774), the Russians were granted large latitude in Mediterranean seagoing trade within Ottoman waters and gained control of the Dardanelles, a narrow strait that links the sea in the northeast to the Black Sea. The treaty also gave Russia a protectorate of sorts over Greek Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire and as such contributed greatly to the growth of Greek dominance in Mediterranean trade.The Ionian Islands, off the northwest coast of today's Greece, were the site of conflict between Venice, France, and Britain. Corfu, the largest of the island chain, was under Venetian control until Napoleon wrested it from Venice, effectively bringing about the end of the Venetian overseas empire. Some years later the islands came under a British protectorate, before being joined with Greece in 1864. The rapid growth of Napoleonic power in Europe made the Mediterranean a strategically vital site in the efforts of British, Habsburg, and Russian powers to stem the growth of France. The Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), the basis for modern-day concepts of the balance of power, laid a plan for maintaining equilibrium between the Great Powers; equitable division of the Mediterranean was one of its core components. Over the course of the century, Britain and France took control of most of formerly Ottoman North Africa, most notably with France taking Algeria in 1830 and Great Britain taking Egypt in 1882.Internal conflicts as well as international ones also led to significant changes in the region. Under Mehmet Ali (1769–1849), Egypt was modernized over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, and the port city of Alexandria emerged as the Mediterranean city par excellence. In 1848 revolutions within the Habsburg Empire, France, and particularly the Italian States further destabilized the region.With the exponential growth of trade and industry in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the nineteenth century saw the rise of a number of important port cities, known for their markedly high levels of liberal cosmopolitanism, cultural diversity, and multilinguality. Such cities as Izmir on the Asia Minor coast, Alexandria in Egypt, Salonika in Greek Macedonia, Trieste on the Adriatic in northeastern Italy, and Marseilles and Toulon on the French coast are prime examples. At the same time, vast engineering projects reclaimed some of the Mediterranean's earlier centrality to global seagoing trade. The Suez Canal, which opened in 1869, linked the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and thus to the Arabian Sea, while the Corinth Canal (1893) linked the Aegean and Ionian Seas within the Mediterranean. With this renewed economic importance, struggle for control of the region intensified further.See alsoAfrica; France; Italy; Ottoman Empire.bibliographyAbulafia, Daniel, ed. The Mediterranean in History. London, 2003.Bradford, Ernle Dusgate Selby. Mediterranean: Portrait of a Sea. London, 1971.Braudel, Fernand. The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. Vol. 2. Translated from the French by Siân Reynolds. Berkeley, Calif., 1995.Kurth, James, and James Petras, eds. Mediterranean Paradoxes: Politics and Social Structure in Southern Europe. Providence, R.I., 1993.Swain, James E. The Struggle for the Control of the Mediterranean Prior to 1848: A Study in Anglo-French Relations. Boston, 1933.K. Fleming views updated May 08 2018 For centuries, the Mediterranean Sea has been the focal point of western civilization. It is an area rich in history and has played critical roles in the development of shipping and trade, as a resource for feeding growing populations, and as an aid to the spread and mingling of races and cultures.The Mediterranean began to form about 250 million years ago when the Eurasian and African continental plates began moving toward each other, pinching off the Tethys Sea, an extensive shallow sea that separated Europe and much of Asia from Africa and India. It now has only two outlets, the Straits of Gibraltar and the Bosporus, a narrow strait between the Mediterranean and Black Seas. While the central basin of the Mediterranean reaches depths of several thousand yards, there is a sill under the Straits of Gibraltar that is only 1,970 feet (600 m) below the surface. Through this passageway flows surface water from the Atlantic Ocean.Since the Mediterranean is situated in one of the world's arid belts, the inputs from precipitation and rivers is far less than the water lost through evaporation. If the straight at Gibraltar were to close due to further plate movements, the Mediterranean would dry up. In fact, data from the Deep Sea Drilling Project, seismic surveys, and fossil analysis have found evidence of salt deposits, ancient river valleys, and fresh water animals, all suggesting that this has occurred at least once. Since the African and Eurasian plates are moving together, this will probably happen again.Humans can do nothing about this impending geological disaster. There are, however, events that people can influence. Domestic sewage, industrial discharge , agricultural runoff , and oil spills are seriously threatening the Mediterranean, fouling its once clear waters, altering its chemical cycling, and killing its organisms. Along its northern coastline are some of the most heavily industrialized nations in the world, whose industries are destroying nearshore nursery habitats, damaging fisheries. Dams on inflowing rivers reduce the sediment inputs, making coastal erosion a major problem. Shipping, once the hallmark of Mediterranean civilization, releases every manner of waste into the Sea, including oil. Annually, 6 million barrels of oil end up in the Mediterranean. The limited water circulation patterns of the Mediterranean compound this problem as pollutants accumulate.Today seafood contamination and eye, skin, and intestinal diseases are frequently experienced by coastal residents. Marine mammal and sea turtle populations are threatened by habitat loss and nondegradable pollutants dumped into the waters. Sea grass (Posidonia oceanica), which provides food and habitat for some 400 species of algae and thousands of species of fish and invertebrates, is disappearing. Nutrient enrichment of the Mediterranean results in large plankton blooms which, combined with destructive fishing practices, contribute to the demise of the sea grass beds.These problems have been recognized, and efforts are being made to reverse the declining health of the Mediterranean. Early efforts included the 1910 construction of one of the first institutions for study of the seas, the Musée Oceanographique by Prince Albert I of Monaco. Since then, the conflicts between the political and religious ideologies of the 18 nations surrounding the Mediterranean have been major hurdles in completing cleanup plans. In 1976, the Mediterranean Action Plan was signed by 13 of the nations. A major component of this agreement was the Blue Plan, a study of future effects of increasing coastal populations. Other efforts include the Genoa Declaration in 1985 and the Nicosia Charter in 1990. The latter commits resources of the community, the World Bank , the European Investment Bank, and the United Nations Environment Programme to achieve a Mediterranean environment compatible with sustainable development by 2025. Hopefully, these efforts can reverse the decline of this natural wonder.See also Algal bloom; Biofouling; Commercial fishing; Environmental degradation; Ocean dumping; Water pollution[William G. Ambrose and Paul E. Renaud] RESOURCESBOOKSHeezen, B. C., and C. D. Hollister. Faces of the Deep. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.Thurman, H. V. Essentials of Oceanography. Columbus: Merrill, 1983.PERIODICALSBatisse, M. "Probing the Future of the Mediterranean Basin." Environment 32 (1990): 4–15. views updated May 23 2018From ancient times the Mediterranean Sea served as a great highway, linking the lands around its shores. It played an important role in the Roman Empire, in the rise of Italy's maritime* cities, and in the expansion of the Islamic world across northern Africa to Spain. In the centuries before the Renaissance, Venice and Genoa regarded the Mediterranean as their own special province to use and to fight over.Economic Role of the Mediterranean. The economic importance of the Mediterranean Sea in the late Middle Ages was reflected in the prosperity of the northern Italian cities that controlled the sea. Venice served as the hub of European commerce throughout the 1400s. The most profitable part of its trade was in spices obtained from ports in Egypt and along the eastern Mediterranean coast. Venice also imported Egyptian cotton, Greek wine, North African grain, and other goods from around the Mediterranean in exchange for cash or cloth, usually from Germany.Venice's maritime and commercial rival, Genoa, dealt in spices as well. However, Genoa was better known for its trade in silks, which came from China by way of ports on the Black Sea. Genoa also controlled the trade in alum, a mineral salt from the eastern Mediterranean that was used in the manufacture of cloth. The city exported alum to England and Flanders* in exchange for wool. From the mid-1400s Genoa's trade in the eastern Mediterranean was threatened by the rising power of the Ottoman Turks*. As a result, Genoa focused its commercial activity on the western part of the sea.Ottoman Rise. The Ottoman Turks emerged as a major force in the Mediterranean during the 1400s. In 1453 they conquered the Byzantine* capital of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). With control over Constantinople's harbor and shipbuilding industry, the Turks had the means to become a major naval power. Against them stood Christian Europe. Their main rivals in the eastern Mediterranean Sea were the Venetians, who had established a string of coastal and island forts to contain the Ottoman threat. The Turks broke this chain in 1480, landing an invasion force in Italy. Although they abandoned the invasion on the death of their leader, Mehmed II, they maintained the pressure on the Venetian bases in the eastern Mediterranean.By the mid-1500s the Turkish fleet greatly outnumbered that of Venice and its allies. However, the Ottomans knew that the key to maritime domination was the possession of bases in key locations. They captured Egypt in 1517, the Greek island of Rhodes in 1522, and the North African port of Tripoli in 1551, extending their control of Mediterranean lands from Dalmatia to Morocco.In 1570 an Ottoman attack on Cyprus, an island controlled by Venice, led to a naval alliance between Spain, Genoa, Venice, and the papacy*. The following year, the Christian fleet soundly defeated the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto. Although the Turks built a new fleet and occupied Cyprus, they no longer presented a major threat to Europeans. However, for the next century the Mediterranean saw constant piracy, raiding, and naval skirmishes between Europeans and Turks.By the end of the 1500s, Europe's economy had shifted away from the Mediterranean to the manufacturing and banking centers of England and central and northern Europe. However, for the two centuries of the Renaissance the Mediterranean Sea had served as the major route between the Western and Eastern worlds, the place where Christians and Muslims met in trade and in war.(See alsoConstantinople, Fall of; Economy and Trade; Ottoman Empire.)* maritimerelating to the sea or shipping* Flandersregion along the coasts of present-day Belgium, France, and the Netherlands* Ottoman TurksTurkish followers of Islam who founded the Ottoman Empire in the 1300s; the empire eventually included large areas of eastern Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa* Byzantinereferring to the Eastern Christian Empire based in Constantinople (a.d. 476–1453)* papacyoffice and authority of the pope views updated Jun 08 2018sea between europe, africa, and asia.The Mediterranean Sea is about 2,400 miles long, covers an area of about 965,000 square miles, and is ringed by a winding coastline of peninsulas and mountains. The sea opens to the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar, to the Black Sea through the Dardanelles, and to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal.Since antiquity, the Mediterranean has been an important waterway for trade and has fostered great civilizations on its shores. The sea's strategic significance declined after the sixteenth century as trade routes shifted to the Atlantic but increased again with the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal and its subsequent use for oil shipping. The 1995 Declaration of Barcelona marked the beginning of political and economic collaboration between the European Union and countries on all shores of the Mediterranean.The pollution of the sea remains a cause of concern for governments in the region, as reflected in the signing of two protocols for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution in 1980 and 1982. Land-based sources of pollution account for 80 percent of the total pollution. Participant countries in the convention for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea have made periodic commitments to reducing pollution, with mixed results. Bibliography Braudel, Fernand. The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, translated by Siân Reynolds. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.Cerutti, Furio, and Ragionieri, Rodolfo, eds. Identities and Conflicts: The Mediterranean. New York: Palgrave, 2001.McNeill, J. R. The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History. New York and Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992.elizabeth thompson updated by vanesa casanova-fernandez views updated Jun 27 2018Mediterranean Sea Largest inland sea in the world, lying between Europe and Africa, and extending from the Strait of Gibraltar in the w to the coast of sw Asia in the e. The Mediterranean was once a trade route for Phoenicians and Greeks, later controlled by Rome and Byzantium. In the Middle Ages Venice and Genoa were the dominant maritime powers until the rise of the Ottoman Turks. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made the Mediterranean one of the world's busiest shipping routes and the development of the Middle Eastern oilfields further increased its importance. The Mediterranean is connected to the Black Sea via the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosporus, and to the Red Sea by the Suez Canal. It includes the Tyrrhenian, Adriatic, Ionian, and Aegean seas. It receives the waters of several major rivers, including the Nile, Rhône, Ebro, Tiber, and Po. There are c.400 species of fish in the Mediterranean, and tuna, sardines and anchovies are among those caught commercially. In recent years, pollution has become a major issue. Area: 2,509,972km (969,100sq mi). views updated May 29 2018Med·i·ter·ra·ne·an / ˌmedətə'rānēən/ • adj. of or characteristic of the Mediterranean Sea, the countries bordering it, or their inhabitants: a leisurely Mediterranean cruise our temperatures are Mediterranean. ▪ (of a person's complexion) relatively dark, as is common in some Mediterranean countries.• n. 1. the Mediterranean Sea or the countries bordering it.2. a native of a country bordering on the Mediterranean. views updated May 08 2018Mediterranean water A water mass, formed in the arid eastern Mediterranean, flows westward, sinking in the Algero-Ligurian and Alboran basins to a depth of approximately 500 m due to its high salinity (36.5–39.1 parts per thousand). This dense water flows into the Atlantic Ocean through the relatively shallow Straits of Gibraltar at a depth below 150 m, while above it lighter, Atlantic water flows eastward into the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean water in the Atlantic then sinks to about 1000 m, where it forms a clearly identifiable water mass. views updated May 21 2018Mediterranean water A water mass, formed in the arid eastern Mediterranean, which flows westward, sinking in the Algero-Ligurian and Alboran basins to a depth of approximately 500 m, owing to its high salinity (36.5–39.1 parts per thousand). This dense water flows into the Atlantic Ocean through the relatively shallow Straits of Gibraltar at a depth below 150 m, while above it lighter, Atlantic water flows eastward into the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean water in the Atlantic then sinks to about 1000 m, where it forms a clearly identifiable water mass. views updated May 17 2018mediterranean (of water) land-locked XVI; (of land) midland, inland XVII. f. L. mediterrāneus inland, in late L. applied to the Mediterranean Sea, Mare Mediterraneum, in which the orig. notion may have been 'in the middle of the earth' rather than 'enclosed by land'; f. medius MID + terra land, earth. Mediterranean Pirate Ship Chasing a Merchant Ship Mediterranean faunal subregion Meditation in Indian Philosophy Medio, Dolores (1914–1996) Medini, Ḥayyim Hezekiah ben Raphael Elijah Mediterranean-type margin medium chain triacylglycerols Medium-Chain Triglycerides Mednick, Martha Tamara Schuch