

“MedOcean”

A material history of connections between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (6th century BC to 7th century AD)

Background and objectives



MedOcean is a 4-year research program (2025-2028) funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR) (NR-24-CE27-5652-01)

- Bringing together five academic institutions, the team is made up of renowned experts
- It comprises **Pierre Schneider** (University of Artois, project leader), **Vladimir Dabrowski** (National Museum of Natural History), **Federico De Romanis** (University of Rome, Tor Vergata), **Didier Marcotte** (Sorbonne University), and **Jean Trinquier** (École Normale Supérieure, Paris – PSL).
- Alongside these five research units forming the consortium, the project will benefit from the expertise of many researchers in France and abroad.
- The MedOcean project is an original research proposal in the so-called Indian Ocean studies: by studying the connections between the Mediterranean and the wider Indian Ocean* in ancient times from a so far unexplored approach, it aims at renewing this vibrant field of research.

*East Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Indian subcontinent, Bay of Bengal and East Asia

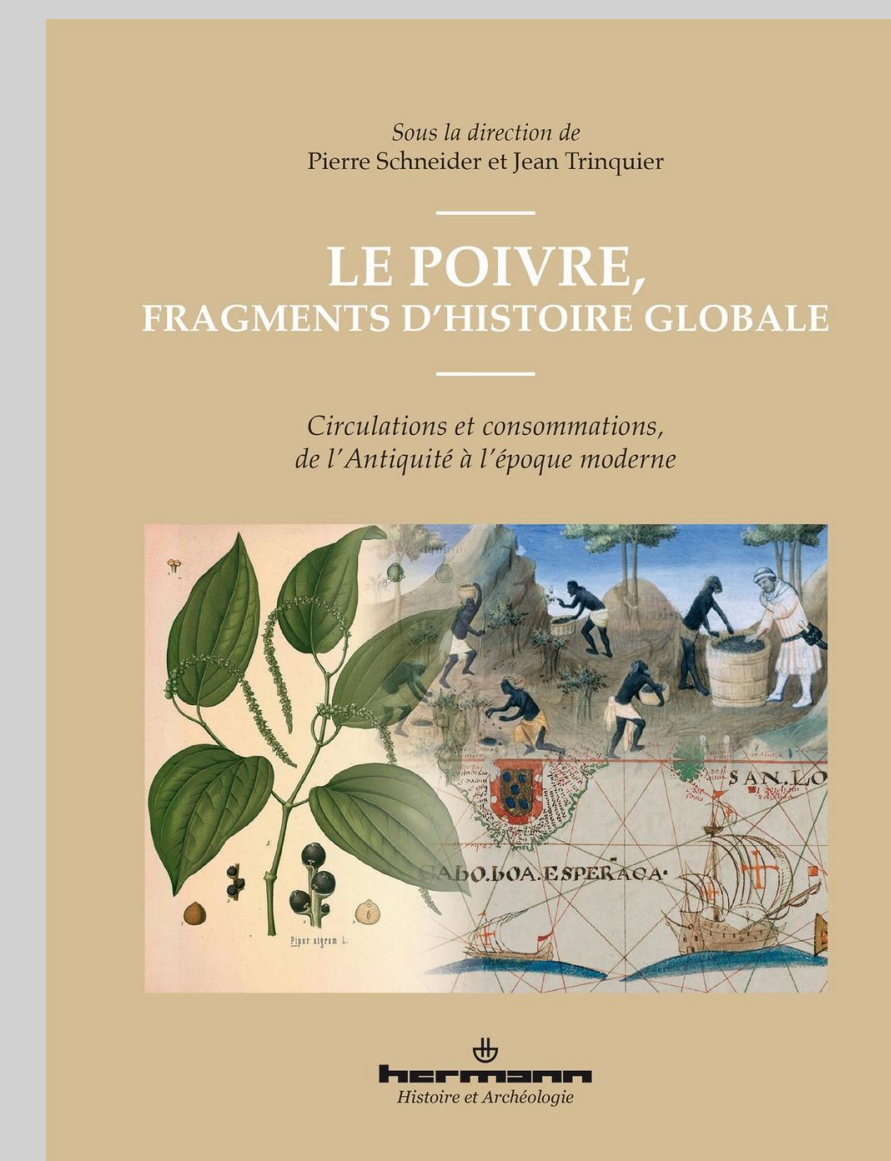


Research hypothesis

- The purpose of MedOcean is to produce a “material history” of the connections linking Mediterranean societies and Indian Ocean worlds. In other words, it is a study that chooses “things” as the point of entry to conduct a wide historical inquiry (the concept of thing will be refined during the project development).
- For reasons of feasibility, the project will only focus on the connections that link the Mediterranean world and the Indian Ocean worlds (termed by G. Riello “horizontal connectivity”).
- The project draws its inspiration from Braudel and Appadurai’s works, and also from the contribution of material culture studies
- This approach has a true heuristic & holistic potential: taking realia as starting point raises almost all questions: production and producers, people's relationship with their environment, circulation, distribution, consumption, customs, tastes, social hierarchies, luxury, merchants, exchange patterns etc.

Methodology

- MedOcean is a holistic research program characterized by a comprehensive and *longue durée* approach.
 - “Comprehensiveness” means that all *realia* will be taken into account: ivory, pepper, mangrove bark, sugar, rice, tortoiseshell, precious stones, metals, slaves, live animals, silk, cotton, teak, spices, glass, wine, etc.
 - The term “*longue durée*” points to a period stretching from the first in-depth contacts between the Mediterranean and East Asia to the penetration of Islam in the Red Sea area.
- All available documentation, from all kinds of written sources to archaeological and iconographic documents, will be efficiently exploited due to the team’s complementary skills,.
- This methodology provides the basis for a comprehensive – yet differentiated – overview of not only the trade system but also the cultural and social dynamics that developed in this vast connected space.



« Material objects have a fascinating power: they convey stories, raise unknown aspects, and lead us to ask open questions that defy easy disciplinary, thematic, and chronological divides. » (G. Riello)

Deliverables

- Two deliverables have been planned: they have been designed to work in synergy and serve as tools for the community of researchers : 1) an encyclopedic dictionary; 2) a historical and geographical atlas. These scientific products will be published online with full open access, be written in English and brought together on the same website (following the model of the “Ancient Arabia” project [<https://ancientarabia.humanum.fr/>])
 - The encyclopedic dictionary will comprise encyclopedic entries for all the items and realia listed. Each entry will describe and analyze one item in its material, economic, social and symbolic dimensions. This encyclopedic online dictionary will subsequently be enriched with entries relating to the subjects, notions and concepts that form the basis for the study of the connections between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (e.g. networks, cultural transfers, globalization, mercantile capitalism, tastes, maritime routes, elites, luxury, acclimatization/transplantation, coastal societies, intermarriages, complex societies, etc.). These entries will be based on the state of the art and benefit from the achievements of the MedOcean program).
 - All geo-historical data referred to in the encyclopedic dictionary will be transferred into a digital atlas (i. e. a set of digital maps and a gazetteer),

Impact and benefits of the project

- The MedOcean program (once completed) may :
 - provide researchers working in the same field of research with significant scientific tools.
 - provide impetus for and contribute to a new annotated translation of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.
 - raise awareness among a large audience of the importance of the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean as interconnected worlds in ancient times.

