

## **Colin Heywood: The Realities of Braudel's 'Northern Invasion': The Mediterranean Voyage of the Prudence of London, 1628-30**

One of the most vivid and arresting images in Braudel's *La Méditerranée* is his evocation of the invasion of the Mediterranean at the end of the sixteenth century by 'les Nordiques', the French, Hanseatic, English and Dutch merchant ships which came to seize a rapid preponderance in the trade and commerce of the inland sea.

But what were the realities of the 'Northern invasion', in social and human terms? Molly Greene has marked up the elements of triumphalism implicit in Braudel's vivid metaphor of these 'heavy insects' – elsewhere he terms them 'termites' -- crashing against the window-panes' or Michel Fontenay's evocation of 'this sudden invasion by the Northerners'; this 'general overthrow of the Mediterranean'. On closer examination these boisterous and even violent metaphors perhaps need to be taken at something less than their face value. Where we are enabled by the rare survival of a ship's papers in something like their entirety to reconstruct the actualities of an early seventeenth-century Straits voyage, the impression gained from one well-documented voyage is not one of triumphalism, but of desperate perils. The voyage of the *Prudence* of London, William Mellow master, which lasted from the winter of 1628-9 to the early autumn of 1630, can be reconstructed in some detail from the ship's papers. It is a story of hard slogging, dogged grubbing for cargoes in ports from Livorno to Alexandria or Rodosto, ongoing disputes with shore-based factors and consuls, and small profits. Finally, at the end of a hard twenty months' voyage, comes the boarding of the *Prudence* by the Royal Navy and the attempted impressment of its crew, the illness of the master, and his eventual death.

On the basis of the *Prudence's* papers, which are scattered in the Public Record Office, the present study examines the voyage of the *Prudence*, in the contexts both of the Braudelian 'Northern Invasion' and of trends in English social and economic history, with special reference to the London portside society from which the captain, William Mellow, and his associates sprang, and of the English caravane maritime between Livorno, Zante, Constantinople and the southern shores of the Mediterranean in the late 1620s.