

Mediterranean - Strange weather - winter 1939/40 (2_52)

Overview

This paper is confined to listing certain significant weather events affecting the Mediterranean during the early winter of 1939/40 in support of the thesis that the arctic North European winter of 1939/40 was primarily caused by the war at sea in the North and Baltic Sea.

Actually, the war in the Mediterranean started only on May 11, 1940. It became aggressive and a devastating experience for all combatants as well as for many Mediterranean countries. The question whether the naval warfare in the waters between Europe and Africa in any way contributed to the downward move in global temperature since 1940 has attracted little interest until now.

This question is also of less interest for this thesis on climatic changes due to 'wars at sea' as the Mediterranean Sea has a very different feature from the North and Baltic Sea. While these seas could cause an arctic winter in Northern Europe, nothing like that would have happened as a result of a war at sea in the Mediterranean. The sea gets a lot of sunshine even during the winter and has a relatively warm water body. The homogenous water of the Mediterranean Sea with an average depth of 1536 m has temperatures of 12.8°C and 11.5°C at its deepest in the western basin of 3,719 m and 5,500 m in the Ionian Sea south of the Greek mainland respectively.

With such warm water body it is very doubtful whether the global cooling for four decades since 1940 was in any way connected with naval warfare in the Mediterranean from 1940 to 1943. Presumably, the opposite happened. Enormous naval activities most likely increased evaporation and thereby lessened the cooling trend, even though at a very low level. Due to its minimal relationship with the Atlantic Current System, the Mediterranean can definitely be excluded from being a serious contributor to a halt in the warming trend from 1940 to about 1980.

However, the naval warfare in Northern Europe 'created' abnormal winter weather conditions in south-western Europe, e.g. -12°C (close to Cap de Rosas/Golf of Lion) on December 24, 1940, while the whole of Southern France was down to about -6°C. The 'war weather case' in respect of the Mediterranean Sea still waits to be written. After all, the Mediterranean Sea may have contributed particularly during the winters of 1940/41 and 1941/42. Although the war at sea had not reached the Mediterranean Sea in 1939, the effect was felt, as the following list of events will show. The reason for this is that the war at sea in the North and Baltic Sea blocked the West Wind Drift,

which resulted in Atlantic cyclones being barred from travelling eastwards via Central Europe. The ‘blocked’ cyclones therefore had only two options, either to go north, or to move south. The path to the North is described in chapter: “Russian-Finnish war – December 1939”; and the path to the South in this paper.

What certainly played a decisive role in the weather in Mediterranean countries during the final days of the year 1939 was a major earthquake in Anatolia/Turkey on December 28. It is impossible to verify here as to from which date weather in the Mediterranean Sea was influenced by the ‘modification’ resulted by naval activities in the Atlantic or in the North and Baltic Sea. It could have happened as early as December 2 or 3, 1939, when Libya experienced a heavy rainfall, 25-litre/square metres, within 8 hours, brought about by a cyclone. (Source: Zeitschrift für angewandte Meteorologie, 57. Jg, Heft 8, p. 271.).

The report listed in the following two sections is not commented on any further. Details of weather-related events concerning the Turkish earthquake are available in the previous chapter.

Earth quake in Turkey and subsequent Black Sea cyclone

29 December 1939; From Agram in Yugoslavia minus temperature of 32°C is reported. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 31 December 1939).

30 December 1939; In all parts of Switzerland the lowest temperatures varying between minus 5°C (Locarno and Lugano) and minus 31°C (La Brevine) had been recorded in the most beautiful weather. In the Dolomites the temperature was minus 21°C yesterday. (Neue Zuercher Zeitung, 2 January 1940). Cold air blew from the East. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 14 January 1940).

30 December 1939; “Rome’s heaviest snowfall in recorded history -six inches-“. (NYT, 31 December 1939).

30 December 1939; “Naples region today reeled under an unprecedented severe snow storm which indirectly caused a train accident ...“. (NYT, 31 December 1939).

30 December 1939; Cold wave over the Riviera. In Genoa a rapid fall in temperature was followed by an extensive snowstorm. Trieste reports heavy winter storms. Milano had minus 10° Celsius during Saturday night. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 31 December 1939).

30 December 1939; Rome covered by 25-30 cm snow; Venice minus 5°C; severe cold in Yugoslavia with minus 23°C (Frankfurter Zeitung, 31 December 1939); cold wave in Bulgaria, the lowest at Rustschuk at the Danube river with minus 20°C. Banja Luka/Westbosnia minus 27°C; in Slovenian cities minus 26°C; Belgrade minus 18°C (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2 January 1940). The Danube River carries ice; and along the shores ice is building up; also in some bights at the Adriatic Sea icing has started. (ditto).

30 December 1939: “The cold wave that followed the snow has spread all over Italy. Ice floated down the Grand Canal in Venice and entered the lagoon, and Venetians feared that, if it kept up tonight, the whole lagoon would be frozen by tomorrow morning. “ (NYT, 31 December 1939).

1 January 1940; Rome has not seen so much snow since 1846, although at that time snowfall lasted three days with a total of 22 cm; this time the snow lasted only eight hours at a temperature of minus four degrees Celsius. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2 January 1940)

Atlantic diverts cyclones to the Mediterranean

1 January 1940; The Atlantic island Madeira reports heavy thunderstorm with heavy flooding. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2 January 1940).

4 January 1940; Heavy rains during several days in Southern Spain caused severe flooding. Water in Guadalquivir River has risen by 15 metres. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 5 January 1940).

6 January 1940; Heavy flooding in Tajo river in Portugal. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 8 January 1940).

11 January 1940; In Northeast and Central Italy heavy storms with a wind speed up to 120 km from the West was reported, (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 11 January 1940).

11 January 1940; Macedonia. Several people froze to death in Macedonia. (NYT, 12 January 1940).

11 January 1940; Greece. Storms lashed the Greek coast, driving the passenger vessel *Leon* ashore. (NYT, 12 January 1940).

13 January 1940; Rome. Reports of death, injury and extensive damage to property came from all over Italy today as a result of one of the worst storms in years, which in Rome disrupted telephone service. Thirteen persons were known to have been killed and three ships wrecked. (NYT, 14 January 1940).

13 January 1940; Temperatures fell in Portugal; Sierre de Estella reports 9°C below zero temperatures; and very unusual snowfall at Coimbra. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 14 January 1940).

14 January 1940; Snowstorms continued all over Spain preventing ships from leaving ports. The speed train from Valencia to Tarragona stranded in snow. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 14 January 1940).

15 January 1940; Heavy snowstorms all over Spain continue. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 15 January 1940).

18 January 1940; In the Navarro region a violent snowstorm rages; the road from Irun to Madrid is covered with 70 cm snow (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 18 January 1940).

21 January 1940; In Paris (Porte de Lilas) minus 20 degrees Celsius; it is the severest winter since 1917 with 22 degrees below zero. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 22 January 1940).

23 January 1940; At Madrid it has been snowing continuously for the last few days. Snow cover was higher than in the winter of 1906. Never before has so much snow been recorded. At Bilbao the traffic was interrupted and work at the seaport stopped. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 25 January 1940).

25 January 1940; All over a number of Spanish provinces cold has doubled. In Madrid the temperature fell to -18°C; at Valladolid to -13°C. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 26 January 1940).

Months
later:

