

Mediterranean Sea, Modernity
and the Contemporary
Geographical Metaphors for Rethinking Space
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This contribution will focus on the idea of the Mediterranean as a *medium* between lands, as a space of communication and movement, but also as a «device of civilization». The Mediterranean Sea represents an archetype and metaphor which may be used to describe other Mediterraneans existing in the world, on the basis of three constituent features: the fragmenting into microregions which are in turn, constantly being redefined; the precariousness of its landscape which brings about continuous changes in its systems of production; and the high level of mobility which favors interconnection among peoples.

These characteristics also provide the conceptual framework which, since the end of the 14th century, has made the Mediterranean Sea into a laboratory for a new way of representing the world, a gradual process containing several pivotal stages, three of which will be outlined here.

The birth and flow of Modernity - The first part of the contribution considers the dawn of geographical Modernity,

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describing it by retracing how Ptolemy's *Geographia* moved around and influenced the Italian courts of the Renaissance, and singling out just a few significant features of what can be considered to be the most revolutionary form of Mediterranean thinking.

Within this framework, a sample of physical, as well as intellectual and cultural heritage is introduced and displayed: the world map made by the Greek cartographer George Amiroutzes and his son in 1465, commissioned by the Ottoman sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. The success of this endeavour was soon followed by the first Arabic translation of Ptolemy's *Geographia*. The investigation of this historical event and its protagonists throws light upon a close network of mediators and travellers between Europe and Istanbul, who represent an extraordinary piece of shared memory too often forgotten in the histories of the relationships between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The world as a globe - The second part of the contribution deals with the transformation of the world's surface from flatness and linear relationships into what is nowadays known as Globalization. The cosmopolitan cities of the 19th century, especially those situated in the Levant, had an important role to play as laboratories for a world that was overcoming the limitations imposed by modern statehood, at the roots of which lay the breakthrough represented by the Venetian archetype of the 16th century, with its wide-flung network of trade and ambitions.

The Contemporary - In conclusion, a brief analysis is made of geographical space in the Contemporary Age, where the modern forms of statehood resulting from the two previous steps come up against some insidious faultiness, given the

difficulties encountered in integrating the present substantial migratory flows into current definitions of statehood.

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