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For a Geo-Philology of the Sea. Writing Cartography, Mapping the Mediterranean *Mare Historiarum*, from Dante to Renaissance Islands Books

In classical geography, location was used to describe relation, quantity, and process. It was the philosophical where (Lukermann 1961, 194)

Do maps add anything, to our knowledge of literature?” (Moretti 2007, 35).

Abstract: In this paper I share questions related to geographic poetics of the Mediterranean: how do we read the sea as a narrative space? In the attempt to put in place an alphabet of the sea, the paper tries to raise questions about the predominant role played by the Mediterranean in the Italian Trecento, in a intersection of geography and literature. Following the first nautical maps and the increased coast to coast activities of merchants, from Dante to Renaissance Island Books the definition of the geographical space pass through myths. Finally, following the itineraries and crossings of the sea, a cartography of poetry is displayed in a Mediterranean that emerges as a *mare historiarum*, a sea freed from sirens and marine divinities, a geographical space that ultimately narrates the history of humanity. The philology used in this approach is first used by Claudio Magris to speak about Matvejević’s maritime minimalism in his *Mediterranean Breviary*. It is understood in the broad sense of a series of historical operations which enlighten the context and the construction of text as well as the seafarer’s point of views, so it is essentially an hermeneutical approach, that enquires on the dynamics between map, space, place and literature.

Examining the geographic poetics of the Mediterranean, this paper asks, “how do we read the sea as a narrative space?” Attempting to imagine an alphabet of the sea, the aim is to raise questions about the predominant role played by the Mediterranean in the Italian Trecento, in an intersection of geography and literature. Following the first nautical maps and the increased coast to coast activities of merchants, from Dante to Renaissance Island Books, the geographical space of the Mediterranean moves beyond the mythical narratives of ancient times. Finally, the itineraries and crossings of the sea reveal a cartography of poetry in a Mediterranean that emerges as a *mare historiarum*, a sea freed from sirens and marine divinities, a geographical space that ultimately narrates the history of humanity.

The philology I use in this approach is not (of course) one that follows the “genealogical or Lachmannian law to establish a ‘critical text’”. First used by Claudio Magris to speak about Matvejević’s *maritime minimalism* in his *Mediterranean Breviary* this, “a philology of the sea” essentially consists in an hermeneutical approach that aims to underline the context and the construction of text, expanded by the seafarer’s points of view.

From the “Manifestos” to the Manuals: the Imaginary and the Real Sea

“The Mediterranean is not only geography” (Matvejević 2004, 18), Predrag Matvejević sharply stresses, almost inviting study of the artistic representation of the sea – that is, the sea read and studied as a literary space inspiring *Il mare salato* (Morosini, 2020). *Maritime minimalism*, after all, gives birth to poetry, but also to authentic philology. It provides the premise for “a philology of the sea,” as Claudio Magris defined the methodological discourse of and around the Mediterranean in Matvejević’s *Mediterranean breviary*, for the union of rigour and audacity (Magris 2008, 7–12), the same as the Catalan watchmaker that he had met in Alexandria. The Catalan had patiently tried to rebuild the catalogue of the devastated library of the city, the largest of antiquity on the basis of the few information he had available.

It may be useful to sketch its history, from its original “manifestos” or programs, to its fullest awareness of being a new discipline both for the subject matter as well as for the main lines of a methodology and approach.

“The best thing you can say to anyone about the Mediterranean is to read again the Odyssey”, states Georges Simenon in *Mare nostrum ou la Méditerranée en goélette*, (*mare nostrum or the Mediterranean on schooner*; Simenon 2019), a collection of reportages that the French writer wrote for the weekly journal “Marianne” between June and September 1934. In his seafaring in the Mediterranean from Pogrquerolles to Tunisia passing from Elba, to Sicily and Malta on a boat to understand and describe the Mediterranean, in the opening lines, he asks himself what the Mediterranean is: “The Mediterranean is, The Mediterranean is, The Mediterranean ...”, and many crossings later, he ends up saying: “the Mediterranean is so many things [...] my job, as Stevenson used to say, is of the narrator of stories”, linking the description of the sea to its narration.

In 2015, in a book titled *Narrating the sea*, Bjorn Larsson wonders about the sea and its literary representation:

First of all, what sea is it? Is it the real sea or the one represented in literature? Is it the seducing sea caressed by a light summer breeze or the stormy sea that does not forgive? [...] Finally, what kind of literature are we talking about when we say that it is inspired by the sea? Whether they are good or bad, aren't any generalizations about 'literature *itself*' abusive? Who can pretend to own a knowledge, a little precise and synthetic of what "literature *itself*" is? [...] After all, who are the writers that really narrate "the sea"? If it were true that the sea represents a source of privileged inspiration for literature, it should be easy to find many who use, and put to good use, this golden field of creativity. In order to clarify this question, some years ago I started a small search for the relationships between the sea and literature (Larsson 2015, 10–11).

The question raised by Larsson about the relation between the sea and literature has been haunting me for many years, and even more so with the rising interest in Mediterranean Studies. Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists of the Mediterranean each proposes different approaches and each, one can say, represents different research "manifesti", from Fernand Braudel (1949) to Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden (2000) to David Abulafia (2011) and Cyprian Broodbank (2013), there has been an effort to find evidence of an interaction between Mediterranean societies and identities.

Braudel understands the Mediterranean in geographic terms and within a vision of history mainly *événementielle*, trying to explain what happened in the territories that face the sea and their interactions at a certain time in history, while Abulafia, moving away from the French historian's "horizontal vision", privileges the study of a human history of the sea shifting the attention to what happens on the surface of the water and to those who crossed it. To the continental model of the Mediterranean basin, identified on the northern borders with the olive, and the southern oriental of the palm, that is the environmental approach, Horden and Purcell in their *Corrupting Sea*, propose to study the "connectivity" for the maritime proximities of the fragmented microecologies of the *microregions* of the Mediterranean in all its uncertainty, its risks and opportunities, while the archaeologist Broodbank adopts a "prehistoric" perspective to dig into the most recondite pasts of the sea, and often the humblest ones, in order to grasp the *making of the Middle Sea*, as promised by the title of his essay.

In a way we could talk about this diversity of approaches as representing a moment of a launch and development of a discipline, the moment, in which, let's say those "manifesti", the programs that they propose, promote and stimulate research in a certain direction. Migrations, restlessness across the traditional borders of the Mediterranean and a geopolitical and economical choice to an enlarged Mediterranean, urge all to rethink the role of literature in order "to bring it back to society", as the ultimate goal of geocriticism.

The numerous university academic positions and professional conventions dedicated to the Mediterranean all over the world, even in countries that do not face the salty sea, proves that the time has come to address a study of the literary Mediterranean, writing manuals that provide some principles to rely on for literary Mediterranean studies and articulate a methodology, especially in the light of teaching this new discipline together with migration and geopolitical studies.

In the efforts to articulate a poetics of the sea Sharon Kinoshita first in 2009 first focused on aspects of theory and methodology related to the study of medieval Mediterranean literature (Kinoshita 2009, 600–608). My investigation, however, moves away from Kinoshita’s historical approach. as I focus on geo-cultural aspects of the literary text and I ask: How do we read the sea? The question entails another one about how the sea is written.

Mediterranean Philology

“The Mediterranean is not only geography” reminds Predrag Matvejević. An encounter with Matvejević in 2009 at the International Theatre Festival in Venice, that year dedicated to the Mediterranean, redirected my approach to the study of the sea. He was in Venice with the show *Midrash / Hikayât*. These two words, one Hebrew and one Arabic, respectively mean “research” and “tale” and evoke the infinite aspects of the Mediterranean, addressing in particular the need to research the ways the sea narrates the world, or life, this is why his *Mediterranean Breviary* has the subtitle “Romanzo / Novel”), something that the historian Egidio Ivetic has done for il Mulino publisher: *Il grande racconto del Mediterraneo* (2023), privileging a reading of the sea that takes into account the history as well as literature, visual arts and many cultural agents that narrate the sea as a space of human history. Those two words *Midrash / Hikayât* can be rendered with the English “show and tell”.

In 2013, it was again Matvejević to finally give shape to a philological study of the sea as a geoliterary space when he sent a picture to thank me for the volume *Sindbad mediterraneo*, which opens with his essay *Pane zingaro* (Matvejević 2013, 21–24). This picture (Morosini 2020), with its detailed description of its foaming little wave in the lightness of the undertow, in its being incomplete, is the pulsing heart of Matvejević’s *poetic of the événement* (1979), and became the message in the bottle: why did Matvejević send me the photo, and why was he so generous in details about its title? That wave led to the study of a ‘Minimal Mediterranean’, as he calls it, and forced me to recognize that a wave in Capo Rizzuto is not the same as a wave in Tunis or Genova, namely that the study of the sea cannot move away from the consideration of its aquatic nature, inner mobility, and its

uniqueness and difference. From here arises his invitation not to underestimate “observation of the little but meaningful detail, and the choice of that detail,” as Raffaele La Capria would write in the introduction of Matvejević’s *Venezia minima* (La Capria 2009, 7).

It would be useful to have a guide and a methodology to read the sea as a literary space and teach Mediterranean literature. This intrusion of philology into the study of and about the Mediterranean could be surprising, but it is known that most philological studies are conducted on literary texts that “represent” the sea by means of words.

In this respect, our philology follows the general principles of the discipline as applied to all the subjects it touches, but it has a specific profile due to its main subject matter, that is the sea. Our philology establishes which texts present a “Mediterranean” with recurring symbolic and/or historic and existential values, a sea that is a space that limits and challenges, a world of possible adventure, of success or failure, of health, of liberty, of mystery. Our philology must decide in each case if the texts we analyze fit into a network of problems and make our inquiry relevant. Our philology must also study and evaluate the vital role that the sea plays in the narrative or in the symbolic network of meanings, in the historic and cultural context where it exists, in a way that helps us to see the difference between the sea found in Chaucer’s stories and in Dante, just to take an example. With this understanding of the presence of the sea in literary texts, we come to understand the sea to be an essential part of the literary construction, and we understand how literature helps to establish it as a cultural value. In sum, it is literature not as a document to study the sea but as the myriad forms of language representing the sea that assigns a function that can be now-descriptive and now-structural and assumes the role of a protagonist or enacts the function of agency.

Finally, each discipline has its own philology, and each philology has its peculiarity and necessities, some rules. The first rule of our Mediterranean Philology should define a precise scope and range, to be considered a discipline.

We know that in the Carolingian Middle Ages, as an example of a precise moment in history, the sea is a “notion” without a real content since the nautical culture had died long before. One may think of the first verses of the *Chanson de Roland* in which we read:

Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes
set anz tuz pleins ad estet en Espagne:
Tresqu’en la mer cunquist la tere altaigne.
(*Chanson de Roland*, I 1–3)

Here "la mer" remains a mysterious obstacle, a pure limit to the land beyond which men do not venture. But when we approach the sea in so many stories of the *Decameron* one sees that is a busy space with men crossing its water, for much legitimate or apparently legitimate business was also carried on at sea. A first rule that we may teach in our classrooms is that there are imaginary seas distinct from experience, but that the Mediterranean is, instead, a real sea. When we get closer to a medieval text that speaks about the sea, we have to distinguish if that sea is a real one or an imaginary, metaphorical sea. Call it the "Bjorn Larsson rule," since he has drawn a sharp distinction between the two.

To read the sea from Dante to the Renaissance island books, the methodology adopted here consists of criteria that can serve as epistemological tools: space, maps (and borders), symbols, navigations, itineraries and crossings, time, a sort of an Alphabet that does not follow the order of the letters, but as in the nature of the sea, that is regulated by the winds, it oscillates like its waves.

Space

A rule that has strongly emerged from reading the sea in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, is the strong relation between the artistic representation of the sea and its geographic existence. The study of the sea as a literary space in geocritical terms lends itself to an exploration of this space.

Matvejević says about the Mediterranean that is not only geography, urging the literary study of the sea, but he also alerted us to consider that the image of the Mediterranean and the real Mediterranean do not coincide at all: in other words, we cannot separate the discourse on and about the Mediterranean from its geo-physical existence. Ivetić also talks about "The two seas".

Once we put things in this way, it became vital to ask, whether this would be the case for all writers of the Middle Ages. First of all, of the three poets, only Petrarch had actually sailed, while the other two never put their feet on a boat or crossed the sea. Second, the study of the sea in Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio's works – but also in the case of a writer like Fazio degli Uberti who in the fiction of the *Dittamondo* navigates around three continents – cannot be separated from the knowledge that they all shared about the newly born maps and nautical maps. The discipline of philology expects that we apply its principles and rules, but it also demands letting the text dictate which principles and rules we may use to make our research fruitful.

When Simenon enquires on what is the Mediterranean "The Mediterranean is..." he writes: "For many people, the sea is this: people in bathing suits on the beach, players in the casinos, fishermen in the harbours, men with a white cap

on the yacht, and far on the line of the horizon, a boat that is passing by. For those, the Mediterranean is a very vast sea, with imprecise borders where appears some vague point of reference” (Simenon 2019, 11–12).

We may see the color of the water, its warmth, and other qualities, but they are hardly significant literary elements, unless some special circumstances say so. Most likely we notice the novelty of space, so unrestrained and boundless. So, the notion of space is one that we must grasp since it is a category that comes to play almost inevitably in literary Mediterranean studies, since it reads differently from the mainland. Indeed Egidio Ivetic speaks of “Il grande racconto del Mediterraneo”, always a different one to the Phoenicians, as well as to the Greeks, to “Land and Sea” in the chapter of *Archetypes*.

Our first task will be to abandon many conceptualizations including the *ápeiron* of the pre-Socratics, a definition that Aristotle provides in his *Physics* and the fascinating explanations of Gaston Bachelard or Maurice Blanchot that do not serve our purpose. In this essay, the Mediterranean is Dante’s “major valley of water” *Par.* IX 82 (Morosini 2019a, 65–87). Having said this, I realize that I have opened a set of new problems. To start with, it is a liquid space that one crosses while remaining immobile, that is, allowing a boat or a small bark to move us, as Aristotle said in the *De anima* (II 3, 413a8). In that immobility, however, many things may happen. Someone can exercise violence on those they travel with; there is no way out, no escape; it is not unusual that during the journey there are conversations, mutations of personality, or a loss of one’s identity and other phenomena that are associated with solitude, waiting, or even the fear of never reaching the final harbor. It is a space that the senses cannot measure because the horizon is almost always uniform. This brings another epistemological category to mind, of the sea that separates or unites. Since it is a liquid world where borders cannot be traced, the borders at sea remain invisible.

The sea replaces the forest, and the novella genre abandons the obligation to concentrate on a unique protagonist; these are the two factors that seal the passage from the *matière de Bretagne*, Arthurian literature and the *chanson de geste*, to the urban world built around the Comune, so distinctly Italian, and becomes a privileged point of view from which to observe the coasts and thus define Italy in a moment when those writers did not have a sense of borders and a modern sense of national identity (Della Dora 2010, 1–15).

The correlation between geography and literature, leads to an exploration into the perception of the image of the world and where the sea stands in different civilization, like the Arab. How did they portray the sea? What was it for them?

A medieval map of the Mediterranean in the cosmographical treatise *Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes* (ms. Arab. C. 90, fols. 30b and 31a, Bodleian Library, London, late 12th – early 13th century, E. Savage-Smith and

Yossef Rapoport 2012) compiled by an anonymous author between AD 1020 and 1050, possibly in Fatimid Egypt, shows the Western (from the Strait of Gibraltar on the left, indicated by the red line), and the Eastern Mediterranean sparkled by islands: those on the Western Mediterranean are simply noted as *jazirah* (island), those in the Eastern Mediterranean are more detailed. Sicily and Cyprus are represented as big rectangles, since they had important and vivacious trade. Carlo Vecce, in the attempt to trace the routes that brought Caterina, Leonardo’s mother, as a slave from Circassia to Venice and then Florence, draws maps with words in his novel “Il sorriso di Caterina. La madre di Leonardo” (Vecce 2023), and shows how Venice did not need to colonize by imposing their culture. Paolino Veneto in his treatise *De regimine rectoris*, in Venitian dialect on Candia, modern Crete, brilliantly displays how Venice used to rule over its colonies (Morosini 2018, 161-208). Venice had neighborhood warehouses or little churches devoted to St. Mark, the many Venices, scattered around the Levant.

In Vecce’s novel the sea is a geocritical space of enquiry: as real as it is, it traces routes mapping slavery by following Caterina’s journey as a good, a merchandise in a world of trades in the Eastern Mediterranean. Study of slave-trade in the Mediterranean reveals how a geographic knowledge and understanding of the sea, the quality of the space, the changing perception of this body of water, including its relation with the land, possesses scholarly urgency for literary studies. “Shaped from without, as well as from within”, as Goethe would say, (Goethe 1995, 55; Moretti 2007, 57) a study of the sea as a space, in a literary text draws discursive cartographies that attend to be read.

Maps

Maps interest us here for cartographic literature. “There is a very simple question about literary maps: what exactly do they do? what do they do that cannot be done with words, that is; because if it can be done with words, then maps are superfluous. Take Bakhtin’s essay on the chronotope: it is the greatest study ever written on space and narrative, and it doesn’t have a single map. Carlo Dionisotti’s *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, the same. Raymond William’s the *Country and the City*, the same. Henri Lafon’s *Espaces romanesques du XVIII siècle...* Do maps add anything, to our knowledge of literature?” asks Franco Moretti (2007, 35).

There is a fine line between mapping and map-making as justly highlighted by the cartographer David Wood (1993, 50–60). I am interested in the artistic construction of the map in a literary text, as places that can be “read”. The “rhetorical power of maps” – as Wood calls it (Wood 2010, 4) – becomes the key to tracking what those writers projected in that map as argued in *Il mare salato*.

As a general rule, maps provide a measure of a distance from one harbor to another, from one shore to another. Thus, from this basic notion stems the other notion of space/time so crucial for the studies of the Mediterranean. The knight that seeks adventure in the forest, for example, does not have the sense of space of the sailor who navigates the sea, and the map of the Mediterranean of the myths in Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the pagan gods*, will reveal that one can map the sites of poetry as on a portolan, a map that also offers a cartography of civilization.

According to Revelli, Dante saw the Mediterranean and derived its descriptions (Revelli XXXX, 20–21, 24), from portolans and nautical maps; for Casella however, they were based on the geographic maps of Orosius. But one thing is sure: Dante knew the Mediterranean, its fundamental subdivisions, its coasts, its islands. The same goes for Boccaccio who dedicated a section to the seas and their names in his geographical treatise, something that in the *Decameron* and in the *Genealogy* proves to be a poet-cartographer who maps all the sites of the coasts of the Oriental and Western Mediterranean while crossing the sea, as Dante does, with his own name, Giovanni. Take Petrarch's *Itinerarium* which is a guide for his friend Guido who is set to leave from Genoa on a sea-voyage to the holy land: he maps the sites of Mediterranean civilizations as he mentions ancient and Christian monuments that Guido can see from the water, offering a new perspective, one that initiates from the water (see also Lucherini 2014, 197–220).

So to answer his own question about literary cartography and replying to the Italian geographer Cerreti, Moretti argues that while “Cerreti reduces space to extension. Where objects are analysed in terms of reciprocal positions and distances....whether they are close or far from each other or from something else”, specific locations *as such* did not seem that significant, if compared to the *relations* that the map had revealed among them (Moretti 1998).¹

Symbols: The Boat

The sea (re)presents the paradox of immobile movement. In the boat there are adventures, but one cannot escape. This rule alters the narrative notion that often expects a movement. The sea cannot represent a parenthesis in the narration where navigation creates a sort of dystopia, with a time, and a fixed space and

¹ According to Claudio Cerreti (1998), cartography of the geographers owns more polysemicity than Moretti who, instead, admits to mainly use diagram structures able to make evident some narrative phenomenons otherwise imperceptibles.

with a tension. The sea offers the elements of unknown: the storms, the monsters, the pirates, the shipwrecks, the disappearance in its abyss. The sea flows, but as the trades in the Mediterranean represented in the *Decameron*, is beyond the control of even the most powerful men and boats, who are as vulnerable to storms as the weakest (see Landolfo and Salabaetto in *Decameron* 2.5 and 8.10). ²Also, navigation introduces the element of "alterity," although this is shared also with those travels run on the land, but what is rather different is the speed of the transition from one culture to another through the Mediterranean. As in a beautiful page celebrating the Mediterranean, Boccaccio praises the invention of the boat since navigation facilitated the discovery of other cultures and their closeness to each other, which shows the differences and resemblances between habits and customs that justify the curiosity and the fear of the "other" at the same time (Boccaccio, *Geneal*, X Proem, 1–6). An illumination in *De proprietatibus rerum* powerfully conveys the introduction of a human element, by illustrating men navigating in a section that usually features only water [Figs. 12].

A 16th century map kept at the BnF of Paris and that I am currently studying, reminds scholars of the literary Mediterranean about the close relationship that Medieval literature established with cartography and nautical maps role, raising questions about the importance that navigation holds in a text, and in particular, how pertinent this information is in our understanding the role a study of "the sea of paper" as I call it. The uniqueness of this map privileges the boat, assuming the point of view of the surface of the sea, and from there addressing the attention to what the sea brought to mankind as they organize life into community, for the wellbeing of the cities. As in the two images I chose, [Figs. 11-12], costal towers, men weighing anchor, and a gallow fully convey what could be called 'a humanistic map' of Marseille and Genova.

Dante fills his poem with maritime and nautical images, at times also standing for political or religious values, like the boat of Peter that represents the Church. The poem starts with the almost shipwrecked Pilgrim-Sailor, who successfully crosses with his ship, that is his poem, the Pillars of Hercules, where his Ulysses dies (Par. 2 1-6). Boccaccio in the *Decameron* narrates a human history of the sea as if he were on the boat, while with his own name Giovanni defends the truth of poetry by sailing in his *Genealogy*. Petrarch, instead, does not get on the boat and limits himself to telling Guido what to admire from the boat that from Genova takes him to the Holy Land. Silvestri in the fiction of the *De insulis* crosses rivers to describe islands of the world, and the first Renaissance Island Book, Cris-

2 A geo-philological reading of the Mediterranean in *Decam.* VIII 10 in R. Morosini, "The Merchant and the Siren", 2018.

toforo Buondelmonti is seafaring on a real boat in the Aegean islands (Morosini 2023).

Boccaccio's periegesis with his own name, Giovanni, in *Genealogy of the pagan gods* and Petrarch's choice for a coast-to-coast celebration of the ancient and Christian past in the *Itinerarium* reveal how the invention of navigation ultimately suggests the portulan. In the *Genealogy*, every shore and site reached by Giovanni's boat is a pretext for accounting for the beginning and flourishing of civilization, when men, with their laboriousness and industry, invented professions, started navigating the sea, and established commerce, built cities, worked the land, and developed machinery. One of those places is the Mediterranean, the space the narrator as seafarer needs to cross to reach the sites where mythical events took place; it is also a mirror of human industry and ingenuity in its own right. Boccaccio opens Book X describing the benefits of this sea to mankind, in a beautiful page which praises the invention of the boat and the effects of navigation in the Mediterranean:

with God in his liberality so providing us with benefits, a great boon was obtained for mortals. What is to see, with divine light showing the way, boats, conceived by human genius and fabricated by artifice, now furrowing the waves with courage, now with a stretched sail driven by the force of the winds, on which every great cargo is carried? What is to think of the daring of those who first entrusted themselves to unknown waves and untried breezes? It makes one tremble. But such, although not always, was for the most part the faith or the fortune of these daring men as they ferried in a long journey – I will say carried not only along a course but in swift flight – gold and other metals to the inhabitants of the East, purple garments and spices, precious stones and ivory to the inhabitants of the West, exotic birds and balsam, woods unknown in our forests, gums and other saps of trees, and roots not familiar to every land, from which they seek medications and innumerable delights as much for sound as for sick bodies. Furthermore, what is not the least benefit for the whole of the human race, as an effect of these navigations of this sea, it has come to pass that the Cimber and the Celt from the opposite corners of the world sometimes know who the Arabs are, what the Red Sea is, and what saps the woods of Sheba exude; the Hyrcanian and the inhabitants of Tanais know the Atlantic Hesperides and even taste their golden apples; the cold Hyperborean and Sarmatian tread seething Ethiopia, the Nile, and pestilential Libya; so also the Spaniard and Moor are visited and visit Persians, Indians, and the Caucasus; and the northern islander from Thule treads the far shores of Ceylon. While they exchange their goods with each other, it happens that they marvel at not only their customs, laws, and traits, but nay, while one looks at another as if he is from another world and thinks that he is not circled by one and the same ocean, he mixes practices, shares trust through the exchange of merchandise, and joins in friendships. While they teach their own languages they also become acquainted with foreign ones. *And so it happens that those whom geographical distance had made strangers to one another are joined by navigation and made harmonious.* In addition there are also many other things which, if they are not so conspicuous to the observer, are perhaps more precious because of their continuous utility. The sea offers infinite benefits to the sailing boats of fishermen from which it happens that the sumptuous tables of the rich are adorned

with great and delicious fish and the poor are nourished by smaller ones. In addition, when it offers calm, herds from fertile lands, beasts of burden, grains, and whatever is beneficial for food are carried from one mainland to another. It provides baths to the strong and infirm, and it makes the tasteless strong with its salt; it moistens the adjacent lands everywhere, it fills channels with subterranean movement, from which we have springs and rivers, which unless the sea were not present to receive them, would wither in their channels with the worst plague among men. (X Preface, 1–5)

Boccaccio celebrates the sea as a privileged space narrating the efforts that the ancients put forth in organizing themselves into civic communities, acquiring for the first time awareness of oneself and of the “other,” and of other spaces and races. “Horror equidem est” (X Preface, 15) writes Boccaccio: “it makes one tremble” to think of all the benefits derived from the invention of the boat and the advantages of navigation: it reduced the geographical distance that had made strangers of others, fostered the exchange of goods and of medical remedies, brought “the marvel” of others’ customs and laws, the awareness of “another” world different from their own, and with it another language, the mixture of practices, shared trust through the exchange of merchandise, and friendships.

The same is shown in the Egyptian *Book of curiosities*. The theme of navigation, nautical and maritime symbols, as well as the image of the boat in the text, traces itineraries, shapes space, indicates real geographic routes and through crossings facilitates the mapping of the Mediterranean and its coasts. Maps stopped being a mediator between the earthly and the divine as in the T-O map to be the “visible speaking” of the earthly, and it does it through the presence of a boat and men. By means of the boat, writers map the Mediterranean.

Navigations

A boat, a harbor, a coastal city on the BnF map ms. Fr. 2794 invite us to rethink the constant motif of navigation in a literary texts, to go beyond the topos as explored by E. R. Curtius. The topos becomes a tool of mapping and cartographic investigation in a text whether in Dante’s *Comedy*, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and *Genealogy*, or Petrarch’s *Itinerarium to the Holy Land*.

Locating the Mediterranean in a literary text, contributes to see how it shifted the image of the world on the maps. To see why these changes detected on different maps are important for the impact that they had on the writers, I chose a couple of maps, to visibly show the shift from the Greeks, who put the coast of Asia Minor in the center of the world and in particular the port of Mileto, which was the major port of the Mediterranean, to the Christians and their T-O map where East and Asia are at the top and the circle of the land is surrounded by the

Ocean [see Fig. 3]. Africa and Europe are divided below the Mediterranean, the stem of the T, which extended from the bottom of the map nearly to the center, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and at the top of the stem of the T, the Black Sea and the Don River to the left (north) and the Nile to the right (south), together extended horizontally to form the crossbar of the T which marked the boundary of Asia. Jerusalem is located at or near the center, within a moral-religious dimension. The only point of reference was God judge and omnipotent, the Pantokrator that we see celebrated in the Byzantine golden ceiling, in the Hereford and Ebstorf maps both of the XIII Century (think about the fact that the Hereford map was used as an altarpiece).

On this map of the Psalter [Fig. 3], on the top there is Christ the Pantokrator who has in his hand a globe TO, in the East that was usually on top with Asia, we find a circular coin – in order to indicate the separation from the rest – in which you see the faces of Adam and Eve, at the center Jerusalem perfect and circular, and the southern stripe, the circle of the land surrounded by the Ocean is made of little check boxes, each hosting a member of a monster population: Sternocephali are visible. “Strange people” live in remote areas, far from the religious center.

However, in the 14th century, there is a big shift in geography: the Mediterranean witnessed the emergence of new, more empirically based forms of cartography. Those portolan or nautical maps, of which some thirty survive from the fourteenth century accurately represented for the first time the coast and the ports of the Mediterranean and of the Black Sea, and also the Atlantic coasts of Europe, beyond the Straits of Cadiz. The *Carta Pisana* and the Genoese cartographer Pietro Vesconte’s portolans (1310–1330), are among the earliest to map the Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean, and Black Sea regions accurately [Figs. 5-6]. They depict detailed coastal outlines and coastal towns on their portolan charts. The fact that the coasts regularly followed by Mediterranean ships, Portugal, English Channel, the Bay of Biscay were drawn far more accurately than those seldom visited by sailors is an eloquent example of how nautical maps narrate the sites of human industry, and proves how navigation became the enabler of “connectivity” (Purcell-Horden, V) within the Mediterranean.

A big impact on this shift in the visual image of the Mediterranean came from Scholastic thought and Arab geography, where Arab cartographic tradition and Ptolemy’s *Geography*, which had been copied and annotated in Baghdad as of the 9th century, gain a peculiar place in literature integrating travel accounts, descriptions of the world, and philosophical considerations. Arab geography penetrated through Sicily in the West thanks to the geography of al-Idrîsî who was at the court of the Norman king Roger II of Sicily. In Al-Idrisi’s map [Fig. 7], the inhabited world is surrounded by the circular ocean, but at the center there is Arabia,

the heart of the Muslim world. The Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean are at the periphery of each side of the Islam empire.

Considering that geography did not exist as a discipline in the XIV century, it is quite remarkable that Boccaccio specifies very clearly in the opening of his geographic treatise *De montibus*, that he conceived it to benefit both students of poetry and history, in order to help them understand the geographic allusions made by the ancient writers, and in chapter XIV of the *Genealogy*, dedicated to the role and function of poetry, he emphasizes the importance of learning geography: "to have in one's memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains" (XIV Preface, 3). Transmission of the knowledge of the past goes along with geographical awareness. Medieval writers such as Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Fazio degli Uberti in his *Dittamondo*, and in particular historians like Paolino Veneto, all addressed in their works a desire and a need to provide a space to narrate human history and the useful inventions that marked civilization. The Venetian historian, in his universal chronicles, carefully locates anecdotes and history in geographical spaces, by drawing maps, including one of Rome and Italy.

One visible sign of this change is recorded by Fazio degli Uberti who in his journey on the three continents has Ptolemy first and then Solinus to accompany him in the journey, a sign of the shift occurring in the fourteenth century, from "geography" in the original Ptolemaic definition – that consists of the calculation of the coordinates of a certain number of places, based on astronomical observations and estimated distances, and of technical instructions for constructing from these a world map in geometrical projection – to a "Mathematical" field of study that is in fact born with geometry. See how Mathematicians, astronomers and geographers were portrayed by Raphael in the School of Athens discussing together while Ptolemy has the globe in his hand [Fig. 10].

In the light of these factors, we see in the fourteenth century a turn from iconographic to discursive cartography, where we can consider discourse as a type of mapping that stems from the desire for spaces, which is in turn generated from the desire to understand the world we live in. Ricardo Padron calls it "the spacious word" as he studies the relation between maps and cartographic literature (2004).

This makes the *Comedy*, but also Boccaccio's works, and especially the *Genealogy*, up to Petrarch's *Itinerarium* and the Renaissance Island books, all pieces of cartographic literature. Thus, from the iconography of God the geometer, the architect of the Universe that creates the world with the compass, a symbol of God's act of creation, as in this thirteenth century manuscript [Fig. 9], to Dante's God as the poet-cartographer, the maker of the universe who creates spaces that may be seen

as “scattered pages”, from “the Book bound with Love” (*Par.* 33, 86-87) that is Wisdom [Fig. 10].³

The universe is the book written by the Maker and writers become the makers of space, conceiving the literary geography of real spaces. Not only Dante, but also Petrarch, who annotated Pomponius Mela's *Geography* and introduced Boccaccio to that reading, was attuned to the epistemological and representational issues raised by mapping, no less than they were to those raised by writing, especially as regards to the relationship between artistic representation and truth. The geographic accuracy and the mapping program served, in fact, as a means to reinforce the poet's truth claims.

Itineraries and Crossings

Two guiding criteria have been space and crossings. In the *Commedia*, the movement of those who travel has a moral value. Although a human seems to see it for the first time, it does not assume a sense of a conquering expedition, since it is his own “fatale andare”. That leaves to the pilgrim the constant surprise of the spectator. Also, the notion of crossing proved to be inadequate when applied to Dante, although there are many characters represented in movement from one place to another. The difference between Dante and Boccaccio in this Mediterranean perspective is that the crossings of Dante's characters are known, since they belong to mythology, this is why for the *Commedia* I chose the “itineraries” as an epistemologic-spatial category instead of the “topo-cronography” of Giovanni Agnelli. These itineraries are traced on an accurate geographic map by the poet-cartographer who, through discursive crossings, maps his world and the world he lives in. Dante draws on historical memory to retrace these itineraries in order to map the Mediterranean, from Scylla and Charybdis to the Pillars of Hercules, to the Hellespont using the myths as *genii loci*, since they contribute to locating geographically the Mediterranean and its seas, or the interior world of the poet.

Also, another example is the statue of the old man that represents the world in *Inferno* 14. Dante locates it on the island of Crete “in mezzo mar” (v. 94), at the center of the Mediterranean, a choice that suggests what role the sea has in the human geography (Morosini 2020, 2021).

3 Also in the *Book of the Ladder of Muhammad*, God is represented even more specifically with a Pen in his hand as he creates the world, see more in Morosini, *Dante, il Profeta e il Libro*, 2018.

Crossing the sea is an activity reserved for men and shows a gendered sea. In a society so fully and directly involved in the making of money, “every desirable object becomes a commodity, takes on monetary value, like a beautiful woman; possession becomes an end in itself, justifying any means,” writes Ferrante (1992, 163)

In Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus* a number of legendary women or goddesses are presented crossing the sea. Thus, we see Io/Isis at the helm in order to fulfill her mission to teach the alphabet to the Egyptians, while in the humanistic perspective of the *Decameron*, external factors, God, the weather and everything else fails to impact the destiny of the women traveling through the sea. One example is Zinevra who resorts to dressing as a man and embarks to Alexandria of Egypt (II 9) to run away from the fury of her husband, or Costanza who seeks death in the Mediterranean after leaving Lipari, although she knows how to sail, and survives the sea and fully integrates in Tunisia (V 2); both take full charge of their lives, by learning Arabic and adopting local customs. But these are exceptions to what crossing the sea and transgressing, here understood in geocritical terms, (Morosini 2023a), borders – physical, social and gender borders – mean for the women of the *Decameron* such as Ephigenia in V 1 and the princess of Tunis (IV 4) (Morosini 2017, 65–111).

Time

The theme of time in a consideration about the sea is brought to our attention by the historical perspective of Braudel’s *long durée* that takes into account, before Purcell and Horden the human aspect of transhumance in the Oriental Mediterranean, in timeframe. Here we talk about time as a letter in the alphabet of the sea.

Time at sea is regulated by the course of the sun, as on the mainland, but the time of the sea is made of a parenthesis within earthly time. There is no such thing as a calendar, and time becomes a sentimental dimension: of nostalgia, as one moves away from the place of departure and the distance is measured in hours. This dilutes or restricts space and reduces it to a psychological measure. Two examples to give an idea of time at sea: Torello magically flies from Alexandria of Egypt to his Pavia on a bed thanks to the Sultan’s help, to avoid the sea, its dangers and its dilated time, since if he does not arrive before his wife marries somebody else, he will lose her. Boccaccio introduces the idea that to cross this maritime bridge means to experience the time of the crossing as it happens in Torello’s story (*Decam.* 9.10). Torello has experienced the sea’s unpredictability when his letter to the wife drowned with the Genoese returning from Acre, around Sicily; thus, his only choice to arrive on time to prevent his wife from marrying another man is the flying bed. The sea is a productive space for those who cross, it is an economic

opportunity, it is the place of departure for a passage. The second example is the sea as a “passage”, a space of crossing for the Crusades; it is Genoa from whence Torello goes to fight in Acre for the Holy Land; the coast is the place to return and measure if you have become rich or richer or possess merchandise that you really want. Then we have the time of the pilgrims who cross the sea, or the saints. Storms and dangers at sea decide the phases of a crossing that coincide with the phases leading to a miracle. Time does not stop at night either because journeys at sea continue during the night, while those on land are interrupted. Also, time ends when the boat touches land.

For ancient mariners, there are no holidays or festivities to accompany time as on the mainland, or the ringing of the church bells, and what counts is what Pascal Arnaud calls “common sense geography” (Arnaud 2014, 39–68). The idea behind this is that medieval maps were informed by the “lower form” of geographic knowledge of sailors, but were adapted for a “higher geography” map, in other words sailors would not draw professional maps or use them. This map reflects the knowledge of mariners, as he mentions that he wrote down what he had heard from trustworthy sailors.

Egidio Ivetic points out to the four calendars of Sarajevo, to give an idea about the impact of the Mediterranean on the calendar and vice versa: the canonical calendar, the Julian orthodox, the Hebrew and the Muslim calendar, an evidence of the presence of four civilizations that face and interact on the Adriatic between the centuries XV–XVIII. Besides being a coastal border between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the Oriental Adriatic became the most western area when XVI century Ottoman Islam settled on the coasts of Dalmatia and Albania.

These are all elements that fully belong to the studies of the literary Mediterranean, and a manual of Mediterranean philology should be able to take them into account and evaluate them in depth. With this in mind, I have conducted a number of geo-philological readings of space to argue that a study of the constant presence of the nautical metaphor and the maritime theme invites us to consider the efforts of the writers to represent the sea in their works, almost obsessively, by means of their pen that like a boat traces routes, as poet-cartographers.

Locating and Mapping the Medieval Literary Mediterranean

A preliminary step in reading the Mediterranean has been locating the Mediterranean of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, by means of boats that trace itineraries. Locating, as Boccaccio does in the *Genealogy* as a seafarer on his boat, the places

in which the stories unfold, means to map those places and the stories. In fact, locating the “where,” contributes to assessing the role and the signifying function that the Mediterranean had in their writings (Morosini 2021). Location means mapping, because maps allow places to be located, where location is understood, according to the geographer Fred Lukermann, less as “an analytic, descriptive concept as it was for the classical geographers, than as a tool of criticism” (Lukermann 1961, 194). In these terms, the “rhetorical power of maps” – to quote Denis Wood again – becomes the key to tracking what those writers projected in that map, and the modifications that occurred in cultural history, in relation to what position the Mediterranean holds on the literary cartography of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

Alain Corbellari’s studies (Corbellari 2006, 105–113) have proved to be fundamental in providing the tools to explore the role of the sea in a literary text. Tackling questions related to the mutable role of the sea in the Biblical, Greek, Roman and Celtic traditions, towards a realistic sea with the rise of trades in the Mediterranean, Corbellari’s argument facilitates reading and mapping the sea as a literary space.

Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio all present themselves as sailors, but an allegorical poem such as the *Comedy*, which starts with the similes of the pilgrim-sailor almost shipwrecked and ends with the boat successfully sailing through the pillars of Hercules where Dante’s Ulysses failed (Morosini 2023c), requires different epistemological tools to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and Petrarca’s *Itinerarium to the Holy Land* (1356–1357). A text like Boccaccio’s *Genealogy*, built around the navigation of Giovanni the seafarer that in the fiction of the treatise sails through the *mare magnum* of the fables of the ancients to the sites of the myths and defends their truth of poetry, further proves that a geo-philology of the sea as a literary and a geographic place, each time unique and peculiar, is essential, especially in the light of Dante’s *Ulysses*.

As discussed elsewhere (Morosini 2019 and 2020), Dante’s *Paradise* IX 82–93, offers a starting point for localizing the sea in theoretical-geographic terms.

This is absolutely new: think back to before Dante when the definition of Mediterranean as a “medium terre tenens” had been also adopted by Italian historiography to summarize the main features of the Mediterranean representation among those people living along its coasts: a uniform space, inhabited by similar cultures, when it came to their uses, habits, languages, religious beliefs, economic activities, political organization forms, and so on. “Mediterraneus” was not thought as an attempt to conceptualise that sea – like, for instance, in the *Phaedo* by Plato, where Socrates talked about a “pond” with frogs and ants living all around (Plato, *Phed.* 109b). The word “mediterraneus” begun to be used according to its maritime meaning – namely “inner sea”, located “across lands”, in the *Collectanea rerum*

memorabilium by Solinus, referring to a part of the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder (Pliny asked himself where the “*maria omnia interiora*” came from; Solinus, after reformulating the words of Pliny, changed the sentence to “*unde maria mediterranea caput tollant*” (Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, III, 31; Solino, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, XVIII). Instead, Isidore used it as a noun for the Mediterranean as the “*mare magnum*”, namely that sea across Europe, Africa, and Asia.

To Folquet, the most Mediterranean of the poets, Dante reveals his effort to conceptualize the sea geographically as an interacting space, since a “location of a place is not completely defined for the geographer until it is described in relation to all other interacting places”. In other words, the location of the Mediterranean is established in relation to the “discordant shores” a specificity showing an affinity with the leading cartographer of his time, Pietro Vesconte, who for the first time empirically based a nautical chart of the Mediterranean within the *mappamundi* scheme.

Also, when Folquet says that the Mediterranean is “the widest expanse of water inside shores”, that is the largest valley of water between its opposing shores, Dante first locates and conceptualizes the sea with extreme precision like a geographer, but also in geopolitical terms, since he specifies that the river Magra, separates the Genoese from the Tuscan, not Genoa from Pisa. As Dante notes that the river separates nations, that is people belonging to the same city, but not the cities themselves, another set of considerations comes forward regarding the idea of citizenship that for a man of the Duecento and Trecento has to do with the municipal pride (Morosini, 2022), since Folquet claims to be a “dweller on that valley’s shore” (v. 88). In doing so, Dante makes Folquet say that he does not consider himself a Genoese or a Marseillais, but a citizen of the Mediterranean.

In saying that the Mediterranean is between discordant or opposing shores, Dante proposes an in-depth analysis of the capacity of the Mediterranean to link or divide people and cultures, thus inviting to consider borders. But how to define borders given the essential mobility of medieval text – Paul Zumthor brilliantly defined it as the “*mouvance*” (1992). The constant fluctuation of borderlands and frontiers, as David Abulafia justly pointed out in his introduction to the volume with Nora Berend titled *Medieval Frontiers*, poses another set of problems (Berend-Abulafia 2002).

When Dante offers this hybrid and mobile localization of Mediterranean culture, he demonstrates awareness also of the differences within this world (among its cultures and among its neighbors), not only due to their geographical and physical variety, but also the diversity of their populations and religions.

Petrarch with his pen in the fiction of the *Itinerarium* goes coast to coast recreating the sense of distances as the portolan does, but only on paper. In fact, he tells his friend Guido for whom he wrote the *Itinerarium* and who is leaving for the

Holy Land, that the pen narrates what the poet has seen from far but which Guido will see from up close in his boat. The sense of this distance is determined by the places, the ports of call where Petrarch sees monuments and landscapes of the ancient and Christian past he impresses in his memory, in a sea that is a “pure space” and without any movement. Even more so in the *Africa*, where the sea divides two empires, in canto VI, the clash of civilization is witnessed by the sea, from the water to the coast (Morosini 2020b, 359–369). The three monologues are three different moments in which the protagonists are in the middle of the sea, away from the coast. The sea creates a fluid border between Rome and Carthage, a mobile border that the outcome of the war may change or nullify.

Each mapped site, each coast indicates not only a geographic place, but in Henri Lefebvre’s terms (Lefebvre, 1974), a productive space for Giovanni the poet-sailor of the *Genealogy*, a work that has never been read from a maritime perspective (Morosini 2019b and 2021). It is a space that recounts human labor and ingenuity, thanks to the advantages brought by the sea with the invention of navigation.

It is always a geographic space that those poets describe like cartographers but with words (Wood-Fels 2008).

Boccaccio in his *Genealogy*, aimed at proving the truth of the ancient fables and poetry, never offers an image of a generic sea, but a sea with routes and well-known harbors, with precise geographic and anthropological details, as he maps a cartography of poetry. The same is true for Dante who frees the sea from its monsters and divinity, referring to such myths only to locate them geographically, as with Scylla and Charybdis, and for Petrarch’s *Itinerarium*, all three proving the Mediterranean as an heterotopic space, or M. Foucault’s “counterplace” (Foucault 1966; Crampton-Elden 2007).

It is through sailing that Giovanni maps places of the myth as he experiences poetry and geography as the art of unifying the various scattered parts of knowledge. The places reached by the boat of the poet-sailor of the *Genealogy* are not mythopoetic spaces. They do not produce the myths, but often take their name from the mythical event that took place in those spaces, sometimes even determining a craft.

As Boccaccio looks for “the philosophical *human* where” (Morosini 2019b, 22; Lukermann 1961, 194), he locates civilization on the Aegean islands where he travels twice in the fictio of the treatise. Another Florentine, the priest Cristoforo Buondelmonti sails for six years to the Aegean islands. Buondelmonti’s *Liber insularum Archipelagi* (1420) is the first Renaissance Island book, where he provides a description and a colorful map of each island. Apparently the goal is the same as Boccaccio to give unity to the scattered relics of the Greek past that risks shipwreck

if not rescued, but Buondelmonti's intention is to rescue antiquity from the threats of the Infidel Turk in the wake of the Fall of Constantinople (Morosini 2023b).

In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio maps the Mediterranean through crossings and like in Al-Idrisi's *Geography*, he describes countries, main cities, routes and frontiers, seas, rivers, and mountains, commenting on those maps while following the itineraries as a tour guide. He gives geographical information, but also historical, religious, economic, and commercial information like when he for the first time in literature brings a custom house, the one in Palermo, into a literary text in the story 8. 10. When adopting a Mediterranean-centric economic and political perspective, the sea is not necessarily a space of conjunction between *ici et ailleurs*, from one shore to the other of the Mediterranean, from East to West, and from Islam to Christianity and vice versa.

While mapping the Mediterranean, the sea also functions albeit rarely as a place of conjunction and unification where conflicts are resolved, thus qualifying itself ultimately as the "third space" in Bhabha's terms (1994), an in-between space. Its uniqueness in the *Decameron* is to be a place of hybridity rather than of homogeneity. It is a space of dissent, which, thanks to its plurality and hybridity, is where Boccaccio can narrate the world of merchants and their ports of call, but also the darkest pages of the trade in women and slaves in the medieval Mediterranean.

Conclusions

So, to return to the question I asked at the beginning about how to read the sea in a literary text, I have tried an exercise of philological mapping of the Mediterranean, with the support of geocriticism. Inspired by the map kept in the BnF of Paris, I first located the sea as a space and from Dante to the Renaissance island books the poets proved to be also cartographers as they share discursive maps that convey a realistic view of a sea that is geographically located, also made of meaningful detail of a lively, and lived, human space.

Also, thanks to the geocritical approach, the relations between space, place, mapping, and literature contribute to revealing the paratextual role of the map as an organizing principle of narrative and its anthropological interrelation with histories of people and places where place is here understood as a special ensemble. In this regard, Lukermann justly observes that "the place has a history and a meaning. It incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. It gives the perspective of the people who have given meaning to it" (Lukermann 1964, 170). So, what does the rhetorical power of Dante's, Boccaccio's, and Petrarch's maps tell us and how does this help towards a poetic of Mediterranean literature?

The advantage of reading maps or cartographic literature is to show that to “observe” with the mariner’s view, or in Abulafia’s terms with those who dipped their feet in the sea, for a geo-poetry (A. D’Ascenzo 2015).

Our poet-cartographers bring about a discursive map that narrates the geographic awareness of the poets and their desire of space, locating the Mediterranean in its relation with the story of men, trades, and alas slavery. When Magone who is dying and will die, when his boat is around Sardinia, Petrarch writes, “He said this and his spirit, lifted free in the air so to see from above and at a similar distance Rome and Carthage”. Here is the modern message where Petrarch overcomes his own idea of a sea that divides, when one can see it astronaut-like at a similar distance one from the other. Dante also assumes the astronaut’s point of view as he looks down at earth from Paradise, and encompasses it within the geo-literary perimeter of the Oriental and Western Mediterranean, between the strait of Gibraltar and Asia Minor (*Par.* XXVII 79–87).

This is a revolutionary moment for Mediterranean literature, especially if one thinks of Larsson, who is skeptical about the sea as a privileged source of creative inspiration, as the pilgrim-sailor assigns the privileged duty to describe the earth and identify its limits, to the poet Dante himself. This time the pilgrim sees with his own eyes how that “major valley of water” and its coasts are the representative space of earth. In doing so he let the limits of the Mediterranean coincide with those of the earth, through two myths, without sacrificing the geographic realism of his description: on one side “his” Ulysses that irrationally tested the “folle volo” through the Strait of Gibraltar, and on the other, on the coast of Phoenicia where Jove kidnapped Europa to indicate Asia Minor (*Metam.* II, 832–875), both pointing at two literary travelers of the Mediterranean, and one being a forced traveler like Europa.

In doing so Dante celebrates himself as the first poet who described and localized geographically that sea that from Orient to Occident, seen from above, features itself as a space of crossings, that from Cádiz to Phoenicia and Crete, at its center, traces the routes of the maps of the Mediterranean and gives unity to its “discordant shores”.

Finally, Dante’s astronaut looks from above to the earth, Boccaccio’s description of the advantages brought by the sea in the *Genealogy*, and Petrarca’s privileged look of the world from the water show their attempts to frame or better “encompass” the Mediterranean. *To encompass* is a verb that derives from the Latin *in*, that means “inside”, and from *compass* that is “to surround”, “to contain” “to wrap”, “to enclose through steps” (*com-passare*), as beautifully exposed by Gavin Francis (2020, 5). Like in the ms. Fr. 2794, the map stopped being a mediator between the earthly and the divine as in the T-O map to be the “visible speaking” of the earthly, and it does it through the presence of a boat and men.

The adjective ‘dolce’ that Dante chooses for the burden carried by Jove successfully conveys, with delicate irony, the entire notion of the sea as a space that narrates human history. This is the advantage of a geocritical Mediterranean philology, that is the study of the sea as a literary space : to embark on a study of the geographic poetic through the sea of myths that is the same as the sea of men, the *mare historiarum*, the stories of men that is coterminous with *History* of civilization that the poets-cartographers Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio locate and map in their works. Mapping the sea in a literary text contributes to conceptualizing and locating a culture in a fluid and hybrid middle. From the *pontos apeiritos* of the Oriental Mediterranean, “the sea without borders”, to the *peripheries* of the Western Mediterranean, the discursive of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Buondelmonti, as the artist of the *Decameron* preciously illustrates [Fig. 13] connects, through navigation, the “opposing shores”. Ultimately, a study of the geographic poetic of the sea, is an invitation to explore the power of writing cartography and mapping the literary Mediterranean. Those writers-seafarers, with their boats, that is their pen, offer a portrait in movement of a civilization and its sea. Sailing through the archives of a sea of paper.



Fig. 1: “Cy commence le XIIIe livre *de l’eau* et de ses differances et de son *ournement*”: *Water and the Sea*, in Barthélemy l’Anglais, *De proprietatibus rerum*, (trad. Jean de Corbichon), ms. Fr. 22534, fol. 167v, 1st quarter 15th Century, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 2: *Water or....the invention of navigation*, in Barthélemy l’Anglais, *De proprietatibus rerum* (trad. Jean de Corbichon), ms. Fr. 22534, fol. 184, 1st quarter 15th Century, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 4: *Psalter World map*, 13th century, London, British Library, ms. 28681, London.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> CC-BY Licence.

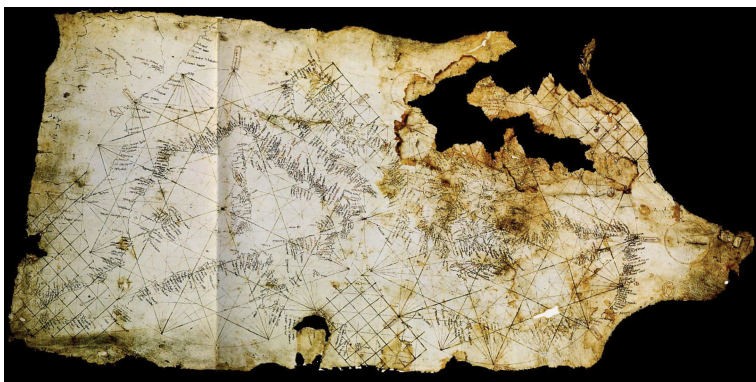


Fig. 5: *Carta pisana* (nautical chart, end of 13th Century ca.) BAF, Paris.

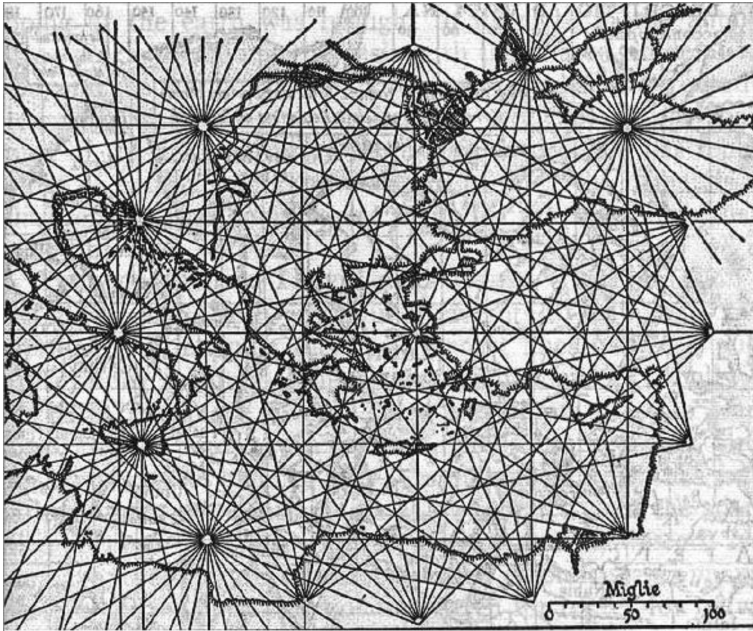


Fig.6: Pietro Vesconte's 1311 portolan of the eastern Mediterranean, the first signed portolan chart, Archivio di Stato, Florence.



Fig. 7: The Mediterranean at the center. *Map of the World* by Al-Idrisi (repr. 1456).

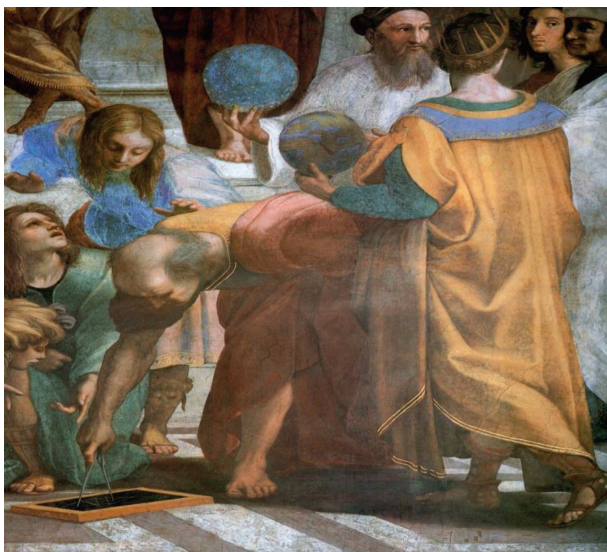


Fig. 8: Raffaello, *Astronomers, Mathematicians and Geographers* (NB Ptolomey with the globe), *Scuola d'Atene*, 1510, Stanza della Segnatura, Città del Vaticano.



Fig. 9: *God the Geometer*, in Guyart des Moulins, *Bible Historiale*, ms. Fr. 3, fol. 3v, BnF, Paris. 14th Century.



Fig. 10: *God the Poet writes the Book of the Universe*, in *Image du Monde* attributed to Gautier de Metz, ms. Harley 334, fol. 1, II quarter of 15th Century, British Library, London.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> CC-BY Licence.



Fig. 11: Genoa, in *Description des îles et des côtes de la Méditerranée*, ms. Fr. 2794, fol. 11, 16th, Century, France, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 12: A coast of France: Men weighing anchor, in *Description des îles et des côtes de la Méditerranée*, ms. Fr. 2794, fol. 7v, 16th, Century, France, BnF, Paris.



Fig. 13: *The boat and crossings*, in *Decameron*, trad. Laurent de Premierfait, ms. Fr. 239, fol. 145v, Century, France, 15th century, BnF, Paris.

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