

Venice and the new Oikoumene: Cartography in the 15th century

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On October 8 and 9, 2013, an international, interdisciplinary conference funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation was held at the Marciana National Library (BNM) and the German study center in Venice (DSZV). The organizers, INGRID BAUMGÄRTNER (Kassel) and PIERO FALCHETTA (Venice), as well as the director of the BNM, MAURIZIO MESSINA (Venice), emphasized as the conference's central concern the transformation of geographic and cartographic paradigms that Ptolemy's work provoked in the Latin West from the early 15th century on. Venice harbored at the time most diverse cultural phenomena that came to be of great importance for Renaissance art and thought. According to Baumgärtner, the cartography of this period interlinked multiple competences, proficiencies, traditions, and orientations. Only through an analysis of those factors is it possible to appreciate the impact of Ptolemy's *Geographia* as the actual catalyst of major changes during the 15th and early 16th centuries.

The conference's first section dealt with maps as well as with text-based concepts of space. After an introduction by GHERARDO ORTALLI (Venice), LAURA FEDERZONI (Bologna) discussed manuscripts and prints of Ptolemy's *Geographia* from the 15th and 16th centuries. She examined the interplay between the rediscovery and translation of the text and the flourishing of geography as a humanistic science. Next ANGELO CATTANEO (Lisbon) presented his research on a little-known, and so far unexplored geographical compilation preserved in an anonymous 15th-century-manuscript of the BNM, MS It. VI, 24 = (6111). The work reveals in content and structure clear evidence of Ptolemaic knowledge. Its study, therefore, will contribute much to an understanding of the reception of cartographic knowledge in Venice. RAMON J. PUJADES I BATALLER (Barcelona) centered his talk on a selection of Venetian *mappaemundi* from the 15th century and their relations to portolan charts and world maps of the Genoese-Catalan tradition. He considered the hybrid world map, documented first around 1320 in manuscripts of Marino Sanudo, a revolutionary new type of map that combines the designs of the latest Mediterranean nautical maps with the established scholarly tradition. Pujades attempted to retrace the transmission and the reception of this map type.

After a welcome by SABINE MEINE (DSZV), the second section of the conference, titled 'Bending concepts of space – cartography and navigation', was opened by REINHOLD MUELLER (Venice). In the following lecture, PATRICK GAUTIER-DALCHÉ (Paris) discussed the important natural philosopher Giovanni Fontana (circa 1393-1455) and the physician and humanist Pietro Tomasi (circa 1375-1458). Both held medical degrees, showed great interest in geography and cartography, and initiated circles for scientific discussion. Their works, mainly preserved in Venetian libraries, have hardly been studied yet. Next GIAMPIERO BELLINGERI (Venice) presented the so-called 'map of Haji Ahmed', a heart-shaped chart of the world with inscriptions in Arabic-Turkish that was creat-

ed in 1559 in Venice. Taking this map as his example, Bellingeri reconstructed the cultural relations between the Latin West and the Ottoman and Islamic East that contributed to the spread of new geographic knowledge until the late 15th century. GÜNTHER GÖRZ (Erlangen), who had fortunately agreed to join the panel after George Tolia (Athens) had to cancel his talk, discussed the potential advantages of digitizing historic maps. Taking the edition of the 1492 Behaim globe in Nuremberg as an example, he illustrated the many uses IT-based research has to offer the humanities and cultural studies, e.g., regarding the commentary in editions and the visualization of network analyses. Then CATERINA BALLETTI (Venice) presented a local IT project conducted at the University of Venice. On a small selection of 16th-century maps she showed how today's computer science can be used creatively in studies on the history of cartography. She presented a mobile app that provides a 3D visualization of the Venice city map by Jacopo de Barbari (circa 1500), which affords users an insight into the city of 500 years ago. This purportedly playful approach to cartographic sources was a controversial topic of the following discussion. It was noted, however, that such technology-based solutions possess added value, as they attract the public's attention and allow public access to historic maps.

The third and last section, under the direction of ALBRECHT CORDES (Frankfurt), focused on actual experiences of travelers and their literary accounts. UWE ISRAEL (Dresden) talked about changes in the course of the Atlantic expansion around 1500 and their consequences for Venice. Based on the concepts of 'action space' and 'imagination space' ('Handlungsraum' and 'Vorstellungsraum'), he analyzed entries from the diaries of Marino Sanudo (1466-1536) and Girolamo Priuli (1476-1547). It became clear that cognitive space expanded most rapidly, and that change, therefore, can and must be discussed primarily in terms of the imagined space ('Vorstellungsraum'). The practical side of seafaring was brought into discussion by maritime archaeologist RUTHY GERTWAGEN (Haifa). Her lecture emphasized the importance of ship building and nautical practices for the redefinition of geographic space in the 15th century. Gertwagen hypothesized that different types of vessels and different techniques had a strong influence on cultural, social, and economical innovations in the eastern Mediterranean. BENJAMIN SCHELLER (Duisburg-Essen) addressed the Atlantic expansion and exploration of the Late Middle Ages based on the travelogue of the Venetian Alvise Cadamosto (circa 1463). Scheller utilized the spatial metaphors 'space of experience' ('Erfahrungsraum') and 'horizon of expectation' ('Erwartungshorizont') for the study of the Middle Ages by introducing the categories 'horizon of possibility' ('Möglichkeitshorizont') and 'space of contingency' ('Kontingenzraum'). Last DARIA PEROCCO (Venice) spoke about the importance of Ptolemy's *Geographia* for the literary circles of Venice and its reception there. She focused on the multitude of relations, that linked the literary milieu of Venice with geographers, cartographers, and their techniques. Especially the intensive exchange of ideas between writers and explorers became apparent.

The conference's final discussion stressed once more that the rediscovery of Ptolemy's work in the Latin West during the early 15th century caused an evolutionary leap of utmost importance in geography and especially in cartography. As the individual lectures made clear, Ptolemy's cartographic method, which redefined space in accordance to geometrical and mathematical guidelines, met with cultural developments whose protagonists used to employ very different methods up until that point. Owing to its interdisciplinary perspective, the conference was able to highlight the ambivalence of religious literary traditions and empiric knowledge that characterizes texts and images from that period. The speakers discussed not only the prominent artifacts of the time, but also less well-known and nearly unheard of maps and manuscripts. In this way, crucial points

were made for the analysis of the radical change caused by Ptolemy's text and its many consequences. The successful conference yielded, to say the least, a number of starting points for further international and interdisciplinary studies on hybrid spaces of experience and knowledge in the 15th- and 16th-century Mediterranean.

(translation by Cornelia Dreer)

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