

Marine Cultural Heritage as a Bridge of Concord: Portolan Cartographies

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fortify the defences of peace in our minds. Artistic expression from any era is one of the greatest assets, as it promotes intercultural dialogue and builds bridges to the world's cultural diversity.

Following this path, the Ocean Art project by the UNESCO Forum Chair at

the Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, Spain, aims to disseminate the rich maritime cultural heritage inherited from our ancestors among our youth. This heritage is used as a teaching and awareness tool for the necessary care of our seas and oceans and the heritage linked to them.



Since its inception, UNESCO has been an unwavering advocate for the essential role of Culture, with a capital C, in promoting world peace (Fig. 1). The evolution of contemporary conflicts highlights the increasing need for this “soft power,” as termed by Director-General Irina Bokova; a power that serves as a bulwark for both the protection of human lives and the preservation of cultural heritage. These elements are inseparable, as violent actors target not only people but also cultural agents such as educators, schools, and tangible (monuments and sites) and intangible (family traditions) cultural heritage, seeking to undermine and destabilize the societies they wish to control. The United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2199, 2354, and 2347 constitute a historic recognition of the importance of protecting cultural heritage as a fundamental aspect of global security. The solution to threats rooted in ignorance and erroneous interpretations of history cannot rely solely on armed force; it must also be waged in the educational and cultural realms. Peace can only be achieved through “good weapons” like education, culture, and science, which





Thus, it not only teaches historical aspects but also raises awareness of the importance of preserving and disseminating this historical legacy, which calls us to maintain a culture of peace. This means promoting a transition from a culture of violence and imposition to a culture of peace and tolerance.

To carry out this task, a research line focused on the study and dissemination of medieval Portolan charts was initiated within the project (Figs. 2-3). This research has developed various aspects, with the history of migration in the Mediterranean being one of them.

This is a current issue that has reached an intolerable situation. Fortunately, to achieve our study and dissemination goals, we at the UPV have the Giménez Lorente Foundation, an essential reference for the study of historical cartography of the Mediterranean.

The Giménez Lorente Foundation houses a highly valuable cartographic collection that includes original maps and an exceptional selection of facsimiles of Portolan charts. These were donated in 2003 to ensure their preservation, dissemination, and to foster their study and research. Since then, it has become an invaluable heritage tool for students (Fig. 4), researchers, and lovers of ancient cartography.

Portolan charts, or portolans (a word derived from the Latin "portus" meaning "port"), are a type of navigation or nautical charts used during the Late Middle Ages, with their use extending roughly until the 17th century. Based on their production centers, they can be grouped into Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian portolan

charts. What initially began as rudimentary texts with annotations evolved, with advancements in cartographic representation techniques, into true illuminated works of art, sparking a passion for their collection.

Since ancient times, the Mediterranean has been a crossroads of cultures and a vital communication route for trade and expansion. It has witnessed conflicts and alliances over the centuries, where control of maritime trade routes was strategic in the competition among nations. These maritime routes, represented in Portolan charts, have influenced population migrations, contributing to the interconnection of regions and cultures and facilitating the exchange of people, ideas, and goods. These movements were influenced by factors such as economic opportunities, conflicts, persecutions, and changes in the geopolitical environment.

These charts, along with the development of ships and navigational instruments during the 15th and 16th centuries, allowed two countries (Portugal and Spain) located at the edge of Europe to launch maritime expeditions in search of new trade routes and new territories beyond the known world. These expeditions led to new migration flows not only in the Medi-

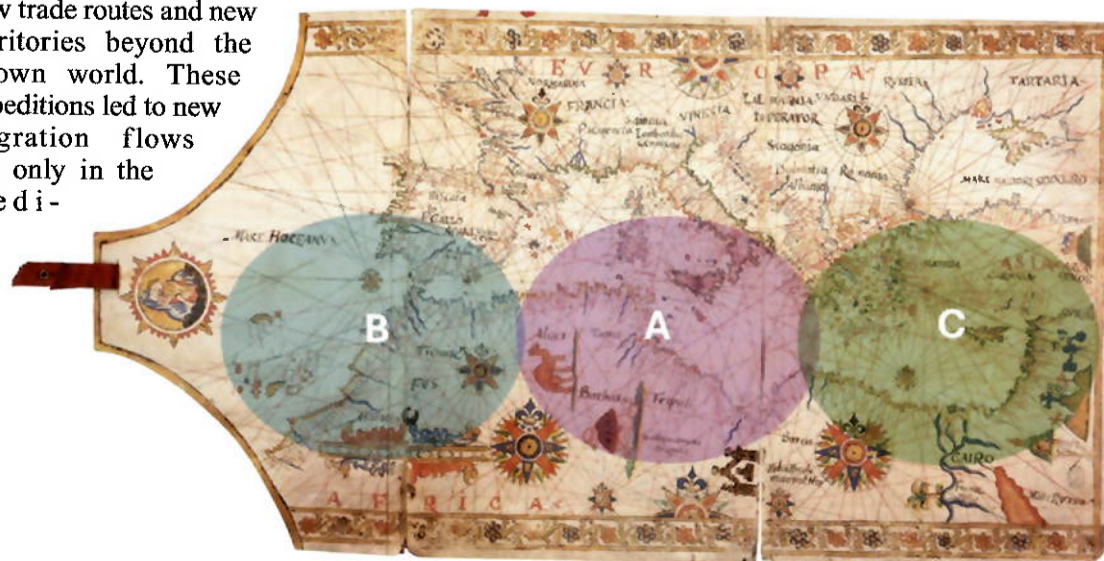


terranean but also to newly discovered territories in America, Asia, and Africa. Undoubtedly, the history of maritime routes has played a significant role in shaping the contemporary migratory landscape. Today, migratory movements are driven by various factors, with armed conflicts and the effects of climate change, unfortunately being predominant in these times. (Fig. 5)

The Mediterranean has been an epicenter of human migration for millennia, with people moving in all directions across this sea. Specifically, since the mid-1990s, countless individuals have crossed the Mediterranean annually in boats from the coasts of North Africa and Turkey, seeking asylum or a new life in Europe. Additionally, other less regulated migration routes include sea crossings from Africa to the Canary Islands in Spain, from the Comoros to Mayotte (a french territory), as well as land routes crossing from Greece into Turkey and through the Balkans toward Europe.

The main migratory routes in the Mediterranean are divided into three key areas (Fig. 6).

- A. Central Mediterranean Route: This route involves crossing from North Africa to Italy and, to a lesser extent, Malta. Migrants on this route typically aim to reach the Italian coast, as Lampedusa Island (Fig. 7) departing from various North African countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Although in previous years the majority of migrants departed from Libya, which serves both as a destination and a transit country, there has been a proportional increase in departures from Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria.
- B. Western Mediterranean Route: On the other hand, the route of the Western Mediterranean has been a migratory corridor between North Africa and Spain for millennia (Fig. 8). This route includes multiple sub-routes, encompassing sea crossings from Morocco and the western coast of Algeria to Spain through the Strait of Gibraltar and the Alboran Sea, as well as land routes to Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish autonomous enclaves in North Africa.



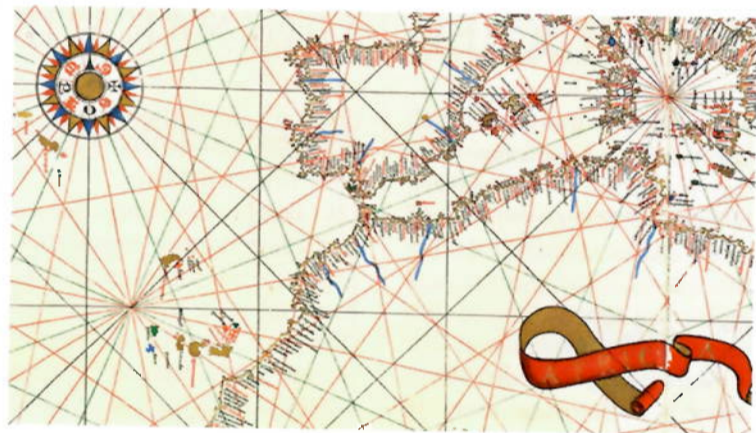
Traditionally, the majority of migrants arriving in Spain via this route are Moroccan, with young men predominating.

C. Eastern Mediterranean Route: mainly involves maritime migration from Turkey to Greece, and to a lesser extent to Cyprus (Fig. 9) and Bulgaria. This route is frequently used by individuals from Southwest and South Asia, especially Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans, who are fleeing conflicts and unstable situations in their home countries.

With the resources provided by the Giménez Lorente Foundation, a set of educational materials is being developed for students in the numerous educational centers of the Valencian Community. These materials not only seek to inform young people about what portolan charts are and the relevance these nautical charts had in the development of humanity, but also graphically show them how migratory movements and the representation of the world have evolved to the present day (Fig. 10).

As part of this initiative, a comparative study has been conducted examining current migratory routes and how they were graphically represented by cartographers over five hundred years ago. This analysis allows students to better understand historical cartographic techniques and their impact on our perception of the world, thus linking the past with contemporary global dynamics. This educational approach not only enriches young people's historical and geographical knowledge but also makes them aware of the ongoing importance of maps and cartography in understanding migratory and cultural phenomena over time.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that in this research, we reflect on these Mediterranean migratory routes through the ancient and beautiful portolan cartographic representations. This allows us not only to appreciate the work of the cartographers and the significance



of their contributions to the evolution of humanity but also to advocate for cultural heritage to be considered as a valuable tool for harmony and understanding.

We hope that the study of these maps can help us comprehend the diverse cultural and geographical perspec-

tives that existed in the past, thereby promoting tolerance and respect for different ways of viewing the world. This aligns with UNESCO's ideals of fostering a "Culture of Peace," where cultural heritage serves as a bridge to connect people and societies across time and space. ■

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5. P. 34. Hundreds of thousands of people migrate across the seas in search of a better life, fleeing from wars, climate crises, or political persecution. © Adobe Stock.
6. P. 34. Nautical chart of the Mediterranean, the Black and Azov Seas, and the Atlantic coasts of Europe and North Africa. Anonymous, attributed to the workshop of Plácido Caloiro-Oliva. 17th century. Facsimile from the Giménez Lorente Foundation, with the original located in the National Library of Spain. ©Vivancos, Ocean Art.
7. P. 35. Detail showing the representation of the island of Lampedusa, one of the Mediterranean islands most affected by migratory currents. Mediterranean route and Atlantic coast. Caloiro and Oliva, Plácido. Estimated between 1600 and 1699. Manuscript cartographic material. © National Library of Spain. Facsimile at the Giménez Lorente Foundation.
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