

Il ritratto del mondo alla corte di Maometto II: il contributo di Giorgio Amiroutzes e Mehmed Beg alla traduzione della *Geographia* di Tolomeo (1465)

Portraying the world at the court of Mehmed II: The contribution of George Amiroutzes and Mehmed Bey to the translation of Ptolemy's Geography (1465)

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Riassunto

Alla vigilia della nascita della Modernità, la storia della *Geographia* di Tolomeo è stata spesso descritta attraverso una prospettiva che ha privilegiato gli eventi della costa occidentale del Mediterraneo. Non-dimeno, un processo parallelo si registrava nella stessa epoca sulla costa orientale, alla corte del Sultano Maometto II a Costantinopoli, la città che sarebbe divenuta Istanbul, centro dell'Impero ottomano appena creato. Nel 1465, lo studioso bizantino Giorgio Amiroutzes (ca. 1400–1475) e suo figlio Mehmed Beg realizzavano una nuova carta del mondo in arabo: una delle grandi imprese negli studi geografici successivi alla caduta di Costantinopoli (1453). In seguito, furono incaricati di tradurre in lingua araba l'opera tolemaica.

Nel presente lavoro, si richiamano alcune ricerche relative al contributo fornito da Amiroutzes e altri studiosi, tra cui Giorgio Trapezuntius, alla visione ecumenica di Maometto II e al desiderio del Sultano di creare un nuovo spazio di espansione. Al contempo, si pongono alcune basi per le future ricerche sui contenuti di toponomastica, geopolitica e geografia matematica nella produzione cartografica al tempo di Maometto II e, in particolare, nella carta del mondo analizzata.

Parole chiave

Modernità, Pensiero geografico, Giorgio Amiroutzes, Impero bizantino, Impero ottomano, Tolomeo, Geografia

Abstract

The story of the translation of Ptolemy's Geography on the eve of the birth of Modernity has often been written with a perspective that privileges events unfolding on the Western shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In the same period, however, a parallel process was taking place on the Eastern shores, at the court of Sultan Mehmed II in Constantinople, the city that was to become Istanbul, the heart of the newly born Ottoman Empire. Here, in 1465, the Byzantine scholar George Amiroutzes (ca. 1400–1475) and his son Mehmed Bey produced a new world map with Arabic texts, one of the great endeavours in geographical studies in the years following the fall of Constantinople (1453). They were subsequently commissioned to produce a new translation of Ptolemy's work into Arabic. The analysis of a number of studies on Amiroutzes' contribution to Mehmed II's ecumenical vision, as well as that of other Byzantine scholars such as George of Trapezuntius, offers new insight into how the Ottoman Empire wished to create fresh room for manoeuvre and express its desire to expand. At the same time, it lays the groundwork for future research on toponymy, on the mathematical and geopolitical contents of cartographic production at the time of Mehmed and, particularly, on the world-map described in this work.

Keywords

Modernity, Geographical thought, George Amiroutzes, Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, Ptolemy, Geography

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1. Introduction: Ptolemy between two Empires

The conquest of Constantinople at the hands of the troops of Mehmed II on the 29th of May 1453 was the event which set in motion the process leading to the birth of the Ottoman empire, which arose from the ashes of the Byzantine one. This new empire was to play a pivotal role in shaping the Mediterranean space until the early 20th century. Leaving aside the decisive military manoeuvres that brought about opposite fates for the two empires involved, the power shift which took place in Constantinople saw the intertwining of very complex human events. This was a time when, on the north-western shores of the Mediterranean, a new way of representing the world was being formed, major texts were being translated and important cultural revolutions were taking place in geographical studies.

In the final years of the 14th century, the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras came first to Venice and then to Florence, importing and translating from Greek into Latin the work of Claudius Ptolemy the Alexandrian which is now known by its traditional short title *Geography*¹. However, as Giancarlo Casale writes:

Significantly, [the process of translating the *Geography*] was mirrored almost exactly in the Ottoman Empire, thanks to the patronage of Sultan Mehmed II (d. 1481) during the middle decades of the fifteenth century. (Casale, 2010, p. 20)

The modern reception of the *Geography* has been widely studied and analysed in its Western context; however, due to difficulties in accessing the primary sources and to the scarcity of available translations, the influence of this work in the East seems to have been less fully explored. As a first step towards filling this gap, this paper focuses on one of the main protagonists of this story, a man rarely mentioned but who was exceptionally in-

fluent at the court of Mehmed II: George Amiroutzes, known as the Philosopher (ὁ Φιλόσοφος), a very learned scholar from Trabzon, who lived from ca. 1400 to 1470, the year when, according to tradition, he died during a game of dice (zār) (Janssens, Van Deun, 2004, p. 297; Babinger, 1967, p. 263)². His contemporary, the Greek historian Kritoboulos of Imbros, who was described as a «friend» (Reinsch, 1982, p. 82), paid tribute to his immense learning in physics, mathematics, *geometry*, the analogy of numbers and the philosophy of the Peripatetics and Stoics (Riggs, 1954, p. 177; emphasis my own). He played a pre-eminent role in one of the most impressive cultural endeavours that occurred at the court of the Sultan: the drawing of a world map according to the dictates of the *Geography*, with place-names translated into Arabic, and the subsequent Arabic translation of Ptolemy's entire work, as reported by Kritoboulos in his *History of Mehmed the Conqueror* (Ἐπιγραφὴ Ἱστοριῶν) (Riggs, 1954, pp. 209-210). Some historians perpetuated allegations of Amiroutzes having had a decisive role in the fall in 1461 of Trabzon, the last independent Greek state: in the process which led to the surrender within the Byzantine hierarchies, it has been claimed that Amiroutzes acted deceptively in order to pressure the last Emperor David IV Comnenus into surrendering, which led to his being executed together with his sons. But as we shall see, this hypothesis has been re-assessed in recent times.

Mehmed II is often portrayed as a Sultan who was interested in the most diverse areas of knowledge. Between 1464 and 1465, in a break in the fighting during the First Ottoman-Venetian War, Mehmed was in his palace, devoting himself to studying the manuscripts left behind by the Byzantines at the fall of Constantinople. The best-known work he delved into is the *Geography* of Ptolemy, who was also known as Batlamyus in the East (Bagrow, 1955, pp. 26-27; Babinger, 1967, p. 263). In retracing the history of Amiroutzes and of the great endeavour of translating Ptolemy's work at the Ottoman court, this

1 The bibliography references regarding the reception of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the West are countless. Here is a short list of what must be regarded as essential reading: P. Gautier Dalché's masterly work *La Géographie de Ptolémée en Occident (IVe–XVIIe siècle)*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009; the *Facsimile-atlas to the Early History of Cartography* by A. E. Nordenskiöld (Stockholm, 1889); and N. Broc with *La Géographie de la Renaissance, 1420–1620*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris 1980.

2 Franz Babinger, reporting a date which was quite widely accepted, put the year of his death as 1475. More recently, this hypothesis has been questioned since the correspondence between Amiroutzes and Theophanes of Medeia (dating 1468-1470) may be considered as his last sign of life (Janssens and Van Deun 2004, p. 304).

article provides an overview of studies in this field, with the aim of offering a fresh reading of the works left by the Byzantine intellectual and his sons within a broader framework of cultural exchanges.

2. The Philosopher, the Fatih and Ptolemy: The birth of the World in the Ottoman Empire

Before entering the world of Amiroutzes, let us briefly outline some of the reasons that make these events particularly significant in shaping how the world came to be represented for the modern age. The Byzantine origins of the *Geography* which Manuel Chrysoloras brought with him to Florence on the eve of the 15th century are well known, and testify to the extraordinary work of conservation and translation carried out there by earlier scholars. Interestingly, Ptolemy's work had already been translated from Greek into Arabic in the 9th century and then further analysed in the context of al-Ma'mūn's academy (Sezgin, 1987a, p. 16); moreover, traces of the Arabic text were present in several Latin works appearing in the centuries before the journey of Chrysoloras. Evidence for this is the Latin-Byzantine-Arabic network which came into being in the 14th-15th centuries, as Fuat Sezgin has pointed out in reference to Chrysoloras' first journey to Rome (ca. 1394-1395):

Chrysoloras was one of the Greek scholars who had come to Rome from Constantinople with the objective of inciting the emperor against the Turks, who had already reached the Dardanelles, threatening the Byzantine empire, and of persuading the emperor to permit Greek professors to teach in Rome. Their prompting of the Europeans to go back to Greek books and to replace by them the Arabic works lasted more than a century, as part of the activities of the two schools founded in Trebizond and Constantinople in the fourteenth century, exemplified by the transmission of the latest scientific results from the Islamic world to Europe through translations into Greek. (Sezgin, 1987a, p. 46)

As well as the rediscovery of the text and its Latin translation, which may be identified as a turning point in European geographical studies, the translation at the

court of Mehmed II could be seen as just as significant, although its consequences may not have been on the same scale as those experienced in Europe in the context of the Renaissance. In 14th-15th century Europe, a new way of representing the world was being conceived, in the form of maps, which led in turn to the desire to complete the new world map by means of the great geographical explorations. There is good reason to advance the hypothesis that at the root of Mehmed's wish to have the *Geography* translated and obtain a new view of the world, lay a drive towards expansion in spatial terms which was very similar to the one seen in 15th century European countries; the same sort of drive which would become a feature of every modern empire. Indeed, Mehmed's familiarity with the tools of cartography when discussing his geopolitical ambitions is emphasized in a contemporary account of him uncertainly attributed to the Venetian Giacomo Languschi:

Un uomo [...] [...] aspirante a gloria quanto Alessandro Macedonico. [...] Diligentemente se informa del sito de Itallia, et de i luoghi doue capitono Anchise cum Enea et Anthenor, doue e la sede dil papa, del Imperator, quanti regni sono in Europa, la quale ha depenta cum li reami et prouince. Niuna cosa cum magior aplauso, et uolupta che el sito del mundo aprende et la scientia di cose militar, arde di uolunta de signorizar, cauto explorator de le cose. [...] Hora dice esser mutato le saxon di tempi, si che de oriente el passi in occidente, come gli occidentali in oriente sono andati, uno dice douer esser lo imperio del mundo, una fide, una monarchia [...] De la sua potentia profetando diro che in Europa, et in Asia luogi che ha apti a militia, et de uictuarie abundantanti. Et se hauera la comodita de tegnir armada in Constantinopoli pensa di poter dominar tutto el mondo.³

³ «A man [...] as greedy for fame as Alexander of Macedon [...] He diligently looks for information on Italy's position and of places where Anchises landed with Aeneas and Antenor, where the Pope's residence is, that of the Emperor and how many kingdoms exist in Europe, of which he has a map with states and provinces indicated over it. He learns nothing with greater joy and satisfaction than the place of the world and the science of military matters, he burns with the wish for dominion, a prudent explorer of things [...] Nowadays, he says, times have changed, therefore from the East he will go to the West, like Westerners went to the East, one – he says – must be the empire of the world,

This account by Languschi has been dated to between 1452 and 1456, although the last documentary evidence weighs in favour of the hypothesis of his death to be occurred in 1453⁴. If we compare the closing lines of the account with what actually happened during the years of Mehmed's reign, we do indeed see the gradual expansion of the Ottoman direct rule and the submission of the Despotate of Morea, Serbia, and Bosnia to the West; then Amasra, Sinop, Trebizond to the East, but a halting after defeat of Uzun Hasan in Eastern Anatolia and a refusal to punish him because «to seek the destruction of ancient dynasties of the great sultans of the people of Islam is not good practice» (Lewis, 1963, pp. 26-28). Mehmed's attention was soon drawn once again to his favourite direction for conquest, towards the West, to the conflict with the Christians. One world with one faith would be the two lines followed in an attempt by the Sultan to forge an empire which bridged two continents.

3. George Amiroutzes

In his own time [...] Amiroutzes stood as the intellectual equal of Pletho and Scholarius. (Monfasani, 2011, p. 6)

Together with George Scholarius and George Gemistus Pletho, George Amiroutzes was a member of the Greek delegation to the Council of Florence-Ferrara in 1437. Works by the former have been widely studied and analysed, with particular attention to their historical and philosophical content. George Scholarius became the first patriarch of Constantinople after the conquest by Mehmed, with the name of Gennadius II.

It is worth mentioning that Leonardo Bruni dedicated one of the manuscripts in which he described the constitution of Florence to none other than Amiroutzes⁵.

one the faith, one the monarchy [...] I will tell of his power that brought wars and got many victories in Europe and in Asia. And if he will have an army in Constantinople, he thinks he will rule the entire world» (full text in Thomas, 1868; English translation by the author of this article, pp. 6-7).

⁴ On the attribution of the account to Languschi, see Davies, 1988, pp. 16-17

⁵ See MS *Plut.* 60.16, Laurentian Library, Florence (Monfasani, 2011, p. 7).

Appointed *protovestatius* and supposedly *mezas logos* of Trabzon, he played a controversial role in the surrender of the last independent Greek state in August 1461. According to some sources, he used deception to persuade Emperor David IV Comnenus to surrender; in the *Echtesis Chronica* (Lambros, 1902, p. 26), a probable source of the *Historia Politica* (Bekker, 1849, p. 38), we read: «And with the treason and fraud of this Protoves-tarios, the Sultan marched against Trebizond. He also convinced the poor Emperor to surrender» (Stavrides, 2001, p. 87). Amiroutzes' position, however, was later reassessed on the basis of evidence which pointed to the hostile treatment he received (together with the other Greek officials) once they were taken hostage in Constantinople (Monfasani, 2011, pp. 7-9, note 21; Janssens and Van Deun, 2004, p. 301). In a letter addressed to Bessarion, Amiroutzes confirmed that one of his sons and a nephew had been captured and enslaved, and also gave a most dramatic description of the fall of Trabzon (Boissonade, 1883, pp. 389-401). At a later stage, according to the reconstruction proposed by Franz Babinger, the Philosopher and his two sons were spared because of their family relationship with the Grand Vizier Mahmūd Pasha, the mediator appointed by Mehmed II who, when negotiating the surrender, is said to have had Amiroutzes himself as interlocutor (Babinger, 1967, p. 246; Stavrides, 2001, p. 204)⁶. Some sources even report that Amiroutzes and Mahmūd were first cousins (ἐξάδελφος), their mothers having been sisters (Stavidres 2001, p. 78)⁷.

As for another aspect which is key to scholars' assessment of Amiroutzes' Ottoman years, namely his conversion to Islam, this is considered improbable, but his two sons, Basil and Alexander, did eventually become high Ottoman officials, and took the names of Mehmed Bey and İskender respectively (Monfasani, 2011, pp. 10-12; Babinger, 1967, p. 263). Here too, although some historians might suggest that Amiroutzes' conversion really did take place, more modern reconstructions point to

⁶ See also Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Historia* (Bekker, 1843, pp. 494-495).

⁷ Stavidres quotes the *Historia* by Laonikos Chalkokondyles (Bekker, 1843, p. 494) and the *Echtesis Chronica*, (Lambros, 1902, p. 26).

an affair which seems to remove all doubt. Amiroutzes had fallen in love with the *Mouchliotissa*⁸, the widow of Franco Acciajuoli, last Duke of Athens and daughter of Demetrius Asanes, and in order to marry her, he wanted a divorce from his first wife. After the Patriarch Ioasaf Kokkas refused to grant the divorce, Mahmūd Pasha urged Mehmed to remove him, together with the Great Ecclesiarches Manuel, a move which proved, on the one hand, just how much influence Mahmūd was able to exert over the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul but also, crucially, that Amiroutzes was still a member of the Greek church (Stavrīdes, 2001, pp. 88-89)⁹. Moreover, among the minor works by Amiroutzes, we must not forget the *Dialogus de fide in Christum habitus cum rege Turcarum* (ca. 1470), a text dealing with the Christian faith and considered to be based on a dialogue about religion which allegedly took place between the Philosopher and Mehmed II (Janssens and Van Deun, 2004, pp. 302-303).

John Monfasani has reported the hypothesis according to which the allegations of deception were the consequence of certain steps taken by the son of Amiroutzes, Alexander/İskender Bey, after his father's death. Indeed, as Mehmed II's head treasurer (*defterdār*), it was he who went ahead with the confiscation of the patriarchal treasures (Monfasani, p. 2011, pp. 8-9, note 21; Stavrides, 2001, pp. 89-90)¹⁰.

4. Ptolemy's Geography

Thanks to his knowledge of Arabic, Amiroutzes assisted Mehmed in his geographical studies, dealing with the translation of Ptolemy's *Geography* into that language. In the summer of 1465, together with his son Mehmed Bey, who had mastered Arabic¹¹, he took part

in the designing of a great world map which was later also recreated in a *carpet* now thought to be lost (Bagrow, 1955, p. 25). This map must have been remarkable in size, if Amiroutzes actually drew it according to the instructions provided by Ptolemy in Book VIII and subsequently developed by Byzantine scholars. For instance, in MS *Palatinus (Heidelbergensis) gr. 129*, a note attributed to either Maximus Planudes or Nicephorus Gregoras claims that the flat surface for a world map should measure at least seventeen feet (524-544 cm) long, while if it is to be drawn on a sphere, this should have a diameter of at least ten feet (308-320 cm) (Mavroudi, 2013, pp. 200-201). Furthermore, among the manuscripts that have some connection to Mehmed's library, Maria Mavroudi lists: MS *Seragliensis 27*, MS *Seragliensis 57* (perhaps the one used by Planudes; the map contained here is drawn according to the second projection and with a full set of parallels, just like the one of Amiroutzes) and *Marc. Gr. Z.516*. The first and the third manuscripts do not contain a world map and «either one may be the *deltos* of Kritoboulos' narrative», whose representation of the world was unsatisfactory to Mehmed (Mavroudi, 2013, pp. 196-197).

Throughout the 15th century, as well as retaining its symbolic power linked to the religious background, the Arabic language was to become the dominant one in the Ottoman-controlled territories. In fact, as pointed out by Mavroudi: «Arabic maintained its status as an international *lingua franca* of educated Muslims and was used for orally communicating and writing on theology, philosophy, law, and science [...]» (Mavroudi, 2013, p. 195).

In addition, Fuat Sezgin has remarked on the substantial discrepancy between the Arabic technical terminology used by Amiroutzes and the one adopted by Arabic translators of the 9th and 10th centuries, and this may be seen as an indication of the lack of influence of these works on Amiroutzes¹². In the 1950s, Leo Bagrow conducted a reconnaissance of maps preserved in the Topkapı Saray Library, retracing the steps of Adolf Deissmann who, in the 1930s¹³, had produced a list of 87

8 Janssens and Van Deun (2004, p. 303) point out that this name is to be linked to her supposed place of origin, Mouchli, in Arkadia.

9 Stavrides cites reconstructions from *Echtesis Chronica* (Lambros, 1902, pp. 27-28); *Historia Patriarchica* (Bekker, 1849, pp. 97-101); *Historia Politica* (Bekker, 1849, pp. 38-39).

10 See also *Echtesis Chronica* (Lambros, 1902, pp. 46-47).

11 Gülru Necipoğlu (2012, p. 60 note 55) remarks that Basil/Mehmed Bey «translated several Greek texts into Arabic for the Sultan, including the Bible».

12 In this respect, Mavroudi (2013, p. 199) quotes Sezgin, 1987b, p. 16.

13 See Deissmann, 1933.

manuscripts that bear witness to the scientific interests of Mehmed II. Among those located by Bagrow is a copy of the *Geography* translated by Francesco Berlinghieri; a copy of the Greek version of the text and the «most renowned» item in the collection, the map of America by Piri Re'is (Bagrow, 1955, p. 28). In all likelihood, Deissmann as well as Bagrow had expected to rediscover Amiroutzes' Arabic world map. In his version of the events of 1464–1465, Bagrow claims that Mehmed's interest for the *Geography* «was quite natural, as Byzantium was the home-land of the “Geography”, which it is customary to call “Ptolemy's” and which had been accumulating there in the course of the one or two centuries preceding Mehmed's arrival in Byzantium». Bagrow indicates Codex 27, redaction B [=Seragliensis 27¹⁴], as the manuscript which was probably available to Amiroutzes, with its maps «scattered in the text»; however, this manuscript contains no world map but only «4 sheets representing the Continents: Europe, Asia and Africa» (Bagrow, 1955, pp. 26–27). This is the basis on which Deissmann came to the conclusion that Mehmed commissioned Amiroutzes to draw the map.

In his *History* of the first sixteen years of Mehmed's rule (1451–1467), Kritoboulos described the relationship between the Sultan and the Philosopher. The latter, he recounts:

[...] wrote out most satisfactorily and skilfully the whole story of the inhabited earth in one representation as a connected whole – of the land and sea, the rivers, harbors, islands, mountains, cities and all, in plain language, giving in this the rules as to measurements of distances and all the essential things [...] He also put down on the chart the names of the countries and places and cities, writing them in Arabic, using as an interpreter his son, who was expert in the languages of the Arabs and of the Greeks. (Riggs, 1954, p. 210)

This cartographic achievement must have been a remarkable success, given the gratitude expressed by Mehmed and his subsequent decision to entrust Amiroutzes with the translation of Ptolemy's work. Two manuscripts – undated and unsigned – which «may be the end product» of

this relationship remain in the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi in Istanbul: MSS *Ayasofia* 2596 and 2610¹⁵ (Pinto 2016, p. 228). The first contains a clear statement that it was written by order of the Sultan and unlike the second manuscript, includes no maps (Mavroudi, 2013, p. 195). The map of the *oikoumene* in MS 2610 represents what Jerry Brotton has called «one of the most up-to-date fifteenth-century representations of the globe based on Ptolemy's calculations» (Brotton, 1997, p. 100). All the texts are in Arabic and the parallels are clearly distinguishable; it was made using the second projection and is South-oriented. This latter feature is the most obvious difference from MS *Seragliensis* 57, which is North-oriented, while the use of the second projection (as in the case of MS *Seragliensis* 57) makes this map an important precursor of later examples of this projection in Western cartography (Mavroudi, 2013, p. 197).

5. Beyond the *Geography*

Amiroutzes is also the author of another geographical work, *De his quae geographiae adesse debent*, in which he collected Ptolemaic methods «to locate sites and understand distances on the basis of longitude, latitude and meridian» (Monfasani, 2011, p. 15, note 53). It was published in 1514 by the German cartographer Johann Werner, who included it in the *Nova translatio primi libri geographiae C. Ptolemaei*¹⁶. Moreover, the cordiform map projections perfected by Werner and Peter Apian may show the influence of Amiroutzes' work (Mavroudi, 2013, p. 200).

15 To my knowledge, the most recent reproductions of MS 2610 are in Casale, 2010, p. 20; Brotton, 1997, p. 101. This world map was also included in the supplement to vol. 2, fasc. 1 (1929) of the work by Youssuf Kemal, *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti* (Cairo, 1926–1951) and in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, under the heading “*Khariṭa*”, 2nd edition, 1978. Although all of these reproductions are in black and white, I have had the opportunity to look at a facsimile of the manuscript, and among other interesting characteristics such as the cartographic net, it is worth noting that the contours of some of the regions and several toponyms are in red ink, which makes the whole image even more suggestive.

16 Full text available at: <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00001875/images/index.html?fi=193.174.98.30&Seite=107&pdfseite=>

14 See Dilke 1987, p. 270.

One of the main reasons for considering such events at the court of Mehmed as particularly significant is the fact that they took place in a city of unique importance, which the Sultan had chosen as his new capital and which was soon to become the hub of geographical studies in the Eastern Mediterranean. Mehmed summoned numerous renowned scholars and innovators in cosmography to Istanbul, including ʿAlī Qushjī (Adnan Adivar, 1939, p. 33), who was head astronomer of the observatory of Samarkand and who brought its remarkable library with him:

With ʿAlī Qushjī came a whole host of scholars as well as artists and architects, drawn to Istanbul as Mehmed sought to redefine the city as an Islamic Constantinople, a cultural capital fit to rival the great civic centres of fifteenth-century Italy. (Brotton, 1997, p. 99)

As mentioned above, the *Geography* is just one of the works by Ptolemy which is preserved in Mehmed's library. Adnan Adivar (1970, pp. 29-31) reported the presence of the Μαθηματικὴ σύνταξις (*Almagest*) on its shelves, but Babinger attributed the translation – completed (as in the case of the *Geography*) at Mehmed's behest – to George of Trabzon, who went by the name of Trapezuntius (ca. 1396–1472), a native of Crete but linked to Trabzon by his family origins. Trapezuntius, who converted to Catholicism in 1427, was also in Istanbul between November 1465 and March 1466. According to some sources, he was instructed by the Pope to gather information on the state of the new empire. However, it would seem that later, he too dedicated his work to Mehmed, whom he described as «Emperor of the Romans and the orb terraqueous» (Babinger, 1967, pp. 263–264). According to Swerdlow's reconstruction, the work was initially commissioned by Nicholas V and was carried out between March and December 1451, together with the preparation of a broad commentary. A disagreement with Nicholas V following criticism of the commentary by Jacobus Cremonensis (the translator of Archimedes) led Trapezuntius to dedicate it to the Venetian patrician Iacopo Antonio Marcello; he then dedicated the translation and part of the commentary to Mehmed II, with the aim of drawing him towards

Christendom. He subsequently attempted to dedicate the commentary to King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, one of Mehmed's enemies¹⁷. After Trapezuntius' death, however, his son Andreas finally put a stop to proceedings by choosing Pope Sixtus IV as the dedicatee of both translation and commentary. Moreover, the commentary caused a heated polemic involving Bessarion, Niccolò Perotti and Regiomontanus, all of whom sided with the previous commentary by Theon, which Trapezuntius had attacked head on (Swerdlow, 1993, p. 149).

The brief journey of Trapezuntius to Constantinople was only an interlude in his complicated life, during which he tried unsuccessfully to gain access to the Ottoman court and consulted with Amiroutzes on the subject of his translations. It is worth noting that the ecumenical vision of Mehmed's Empire is described and emphasized in some texts and lines by Trapezuntius in the context of his translations of Ptolemy's work. In April 1466, on his journey back to Italy from Constantinople, he wrote a treatise, *On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat*, which can be found in MS *München SB*, gr. 537, ff. 67r–108v, previously preserved in the library founded by Venetian cardinal Domenico Grimani in Sant'Antonio di Castello (Monfasani, 1984, p. 492). In this manuscript, Trapezuntius writes to Mehmed as follows: «I say therefore, that in my opinion there has never been a man nor will there ever be one to whom God has granted a greater opportunity for sole dominion of the world than He has granted Your Mightiness»¹⁸. And in the *Preface to Maomettus II for the Isagoge to Ptolemy's Almagest*, Trapezuntius addresses Mehmed with these words: «To the Autocrat imminently of the whole inhabited world [...]»¹⁹.

A further bibliographical record concerning the age of Mehmet II and Ptolemy's *Geography* is the presence in the Topkapı Library of the printed version of the text in *terza rima* by Francesco Berlinghieri, which also includes some very refined maps. Berlinghieri was a Florentine humanist involved in Marsilio Ficino's Platonic Academy, who began his work, entitled *Septe Giornate della Geographia* in 1464, and completed it in 1482. The most distinctive

17 Monfasani, 1984, pp. 251, (text LXX), 285–286 (LXXXIV–LXXXV) 672.

18 Monfasani, 1984, p. 493 (CXLIV).

19 Monfasani, 1984, p. 281 (LXXXII).

feature of this work is that it abandoned Ptolemaic traditions in the running order of the maps, gradually including new ones along with geographical information; this work was meant to be dedicated to the Sultan (who had unfortunately died in the meantime, on May 3, 1481): «To Mehmed of the Ottomans, illustrious prince and lord of the throne of God, emperor and merciful lord of all Asia and Greece, I dedicate this work» (Brotton, 1997, pp. 87-90; Casale, 2010, p. 20). The dedication was then redirected to Mehmed's son Bayezid II (Babinger 1963, pp. 556-557).

6. Conclusions: to draw the world is to grasp it

That Berlinghieri should see fit to dedicate his work to the Sultan is a clear indication of the political weight and cultural authority attributed to the Ottoman court also by Florentine scholars. This is further testimony to the fact that, as Brotton has said, «the Ottomans were politically and intellectually powerful participants in the early modern world, and their leaders were as compliant and enthusiastic in the patronage of scholarship and artistic production as their Italian counterparts» (Brotton, 1997, pp. 97-98).

We can therefore start to piece the puzzle together. Mehmed's desire to draw the world may be seen not only as the need to frame the space within which the new empire should be developed, but also as a desire to take part in that rethinking of the world that was happening in the Western Mediterranean. In contextualising the work of Amiroutzes, we may recall Trapezuntius' words quoted above. In the eyes of Mehmed II, it was the conquest of Constantinople, the capital of an empire which claimed to be the rightful heir to the Roman empire, which constituted the decisive step towards establishing his empire as the legitimate successor to that of the Romans. Scholars such as Amiroutzes and Trapezuntius made no secret of taking on the task of supporting this view and of providing a historical underpinning for Ottoman entitlement both to the ancient Roman dominions and to a world empire. As for the Sultan, we have described Mehmed's need for a translation of the *Geography* as a natural step in conceiving the future and spatial dimension both of his present dominions and of his future ambitions.

Although Ahmet Karamustafa has drawn attention to the fact that «[Mehmed's] active patronage of mapmakers certainly did not lead to the formation of identifiable traditions of Ottoman cartography» (Karamustafa, 1992, p. 210), his instinct for expansion, interpreted in an ecumenical vision, was shared and encouraged by the Philosopher, who was entrusted with the task of providing him with a framework for his political action. The depiction of the world thus obtained may be considered not only as a means of praise, or as a desire on the part of the Sultan, but also as a stage in the creation of a new form of modern statehood: in this vision, to portray the world is to know it, and thereby attempt to possess it with the help of an intriguing scholar: George Amiroutzes. It is also highly likely that the translation of Ptolemy's works was meant to feed intellectual debate within Ottoman circles. Julian Raby observed that the demand for Arabic translations may be an indicator of Mehmed's greater familiarity with Arabic, adding that «[...] it should not be assumed that these translations were intended solely for Mehmed's benefit. They could have served to stimulate discussion among Muslim intellectuals, and it is well known that Mehmed organized theological and philosophical debates. The translations may have little bearing, therefore, on Mehmed's personal command of Greek; nonetheless, they testify to the polyglot skills concentrated at his court» (Raby, 1983, p. 24).

Through the lens of the Philosopher's biography, we gain a rare insight into a little-known geographical debate taking place in the 15th century on the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean. In fact, one of the aims of this contribution is to provide an outline of the state of the research into Amiroutzes' Arabic rendering of the *Geography*, also as a resource for further studies on this work, including the evaluation of its toponymy and of its mathematical and geopolitical contents.

The comparison between what was happening over the same period of time in the Italian and Ottoman courts may thus be interpreted as a complex narrative: similarities and differences in the development of geographical thinking are also to be seen in the light of changing patterns in the personal relationships and encounters between the main protagonists of these crucial moments in history.

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