

Rethinking Imperial Space: Trans-Mediterranean Empires

International Workshop, 07-08 July 2021, Konstanz

Organizers: Manuel Borutta, Ulrich Gotter & Daniel G. König

A great deal of world history is imperial history. The Mediterranean in particular was strongly affected by empires across the ages. Some of them, like the Roman, remained “long-lasting reference points for later empire-builders” worldwide, while others, such as the Umayyad caliphate or Habsburg Spain, had a global impact as well.¹ Thus the region seems to be a good starting point to rethink imperial space. Although the Roman Empire has been researched extensively, the ‘new Mediterranean studies’ have neglected the topic of empire so far², and the post-Roman Mediterranean has been no privileged area of investigation for imperial history. Against this background, our workshop compares trans-Mediterranean empires that had a firm basis in the region but also transcended it. Since empires are large political bodies, they are fundamentally challenged by spatial distance.³ Therefore, we will focus on the imaginary geographies and spatial practices of trans-Mediterranean empires in order to understand how imperial space within and beyond the region was conceptualized, shaped and remembered. We will do this with a threefold aim: (1) By contrasting distinctions between ‘cores and peripheries’ or ‘metropolises and colonies’ that are well established in theories of empire, with alternative forms of political organization such as the ‘municipality’, the ‘commonwealth’, or the ‘nation-state’, we wish to sharpen our understanding of *imperial* space.⁴ (2) By comparing pre-modern with *modern* empires⁵, we try to overcome the narrow time range of the ‘new Mediterranean studies’ that often exclude the modern age or relegate responsibility to anthropologists when the latter is concerned.⁶ (3) By focussing on empires that all transcended the region, we wish to intensify the dialogue between Mediterranean and *global* history.⁷

¹ Burbank and Cooper 2010, p. 4. On the history and theory of empire, see also Darwin 2007; Münkler 2007.

² The Mediterranean paradigm itself was “born of imperialism” (Horden and Purcell 2006, p. 725). On the imperial genealogy of the concept, see Bourguet et al. 1998. On the impact of French Algeria on Braudel, see Borutta 2016. Entries on empire are missing in Horden and Purcell 2000 and in Horden and Kinoshita 2014, and there is no comprehensive study of Mediterranean empires from ancient to modern times. For an introduction to this topic, see Grenet and Rappas 2016. On empires in the modern Mediterranean, see Borutta and Gekas 2012; Rappas 2016; Borutta.

³ Braudel 1949, p. 541: „Mais toujours et partout [...], la distance est l'ennemi. Elle use les hommes, les états, plus encore les empires. Ceux-ci sont parfois vaincus, paralysés par l'espace, aux extrémités de leurs territoires, dans de vastes zones marginales où ils ne peuvent rien ou presque rien, où leur faiblesse éclate.“

⁴ On the spatial categories of imperial history, see Howe 2002, pp. 13–22. On municipalities, see Freitag and Lafi 2014; Lafi 2018. On ‘semi-colonies’: Gekas 2017. On cultural transfers: Abdellatif et al. 2012.

⁵ For a global perspective on empires in the ‘long’ nineteenth century (1760s-1920s): Osterhammel 2014, pp. 392–468. See also Leonhard and Hirschhausen 2011.

⁶ For the latter, see, e.g. Horden and Kinoshita 2014.

⁷ For first steps into this direction, see Abulafia 2011; Watkins 2013; Purcell 2016.

Wednesday 7 July

Kultur-Zentrum Konstanz, Wolkensteinsaal, Katzgasse 3, 78462 Konstanz

Rethinking Imperial Space

- 15.00 Guided Tour through the Exposition „Stoff. Blut. Gold. Auf den Spuren der Konstanzer Kolonialzeit“ (Register with: Heidi.Engelmann@uni-konstanz.de)
- 16.30 Welcome Coffee
- 17.00 Manuel Borutta, Ulrich Gotter & Daniel G. König (Konstanz): Introduction
- 17.30 Keynote Lecture by Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper (NYU): Rethinking Imperial Space
- 19.30 Dinner

Thursday 8 July

Zentrum für Kulturwissenschaftliche Forschung, Otto-Adam-Straße 5, 78467 Konstanz

Trans-Mediterranean Empires

- 09.00 Ulrich Gotter (Konstanz): Communities, the Imperial Framework, and the Sea: The Mediterranean Dimension of the Roman Empire
- 10.00 Daniel G. König (Konstanz): From Caliphate to Commonwealth: Political Fragmentation and the Resilience of Imperial Standards
- 11.00 Coffee Break
- 11.15 Kirsten Mahlke (Konstanz): Imperial counternarrative(s) in 16th Century South American Chronicles
- 12.15 Nora Lafi (Leibniz-ZMO Berlin): Rethinking Ottoman Imperiality: an Urban and Mediterranean Perspective
- 13.15 Lunch Break
- 15.00 Manuel Borutta (Konstanz): Between Metropole and Colony: Algeria, Corsica, and the Midi in the French Mediterranean
- 16.00 Sakis Gekas (York University Toronto): Archipelago Empire: Greece and the British Mediterranean
- 17.00 Coffee Break
- 17.15 Andreas Guidi (Konstanz): Fascist Colonialism as Post-Ottoman History: Imperial Continuities in a changing Mediterranean Space viewed from Rhodes
- 18.15 Coffee Break
- 18.30 Final Discussion
- 19.30 Dinner

Bibliography

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