

Intermediaries, Middle Grounds, Middle Sea” The Mediterranean Seminar Winter Workshop 2024
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Abstract round-table position

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En/compassing islands: Maps, Connectivity and (mobile) Borders

An island seemingly running out of the frame in a 16th century map, seems to suggest the difficulty to read the islands whose names changed over the course of time, and so their borders. Melville warned us that “it is not down in any map; true places never are” (*Moby Dick*), but since antiquity there is a desire to fix on a map a description of the fluctuant and unstable world of the islands, in order “to encompass” them. Gavin Francis (*Island Dreams. Mapping an obsession*, 2020), reminds us that “to encompass, comes from Latin, *en*, meaning to make or put in, and *compass*, to surround, contain, envelop, enclose, with steps (*com-passare*). Perhaps island maps, reined in by their coasts, offer a special case. They invite the viewer to indulge the imagination, pace a dreamed perimeter”. This paper is about literary insularity aware that, as in F. Guccini’s song *L’isola Non-Trovata* (*The Island Not-Found*), inspired by Gozzano’s poem *La più bella* (*the most beautiful*, 1913), the most beautiful island is “that island that is already gone, towards mysterious seas. It has already flown away turned in blu, the color of the distance”.

More specifically, the aim of the paper is to discuss literary islands as in-between spaces, bridges, intermediaries, whose shifting perimeter, from the economic and cultural periphery to the center, oscillates continuously for geopolitical and economic reasons. To rethink the mobile nature of islands, and rethink their porous cultural and geopolitical borders, is one way to identify a modality unique to the Mediterranean of connectivity and exchanges.

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