

# Montaigne, Italy and the Mediterranean

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# Montaigne and the Mediterranean

- In the *Journal de voyage* and in the *Essais*, Montaigne highlights the internal cultural diversity of particular cities and the Mediterranean regions, especially the Italian ones, their layered history, as well as the complexity of the interactions between individuals and peoples of these places. He does not represent the cities and regions of the Mediterranean world according to clichés and platitudes: the Mediterranean is not perceived as the cradle of civilizations in opposition to the barbarous nations, nor is it represented as an area of political and religious tensions where the guardians of virtue, justice and authentic religion clash with their enemies, the fierce and fearsome Muslims. Montaigne does, of course, perceive the elements of conflict that are present, but does not illustrate them schematically, according to a Manichean logic, and highlights the interrelationship with other elements and phenomena (cultural exchanges, linguistic hybridizations, etc.), in keeping with his insight into the irreducibility of difference with respect to any schematizing and simplifying vision of reality.
- The search will begin with a historical and philological study of the *Essais* and the *Journal de voyage*, with the purpose of locating therein references to the Mediterranean and to the political and cultural role of Italy in the Mediterranean region. We can consider, for example, in chapter 32 of the first book of the *Essais*, the recollection of the Battle of Lepanto and the reflections stimulated by the clash between the Christians and the Turks.

## The aims

- The aims of the research programme will be:
  1. To identify and examine Montaigne's various texts on Mediterranean area, his Italian sources and the writings of the period with which he is concerned;
  2. To reconstruct the historico-cultural context against which Montaigne's thinking on the cultural and linguistic exchanges developed;
  3. To detect, starting with Montaigne himself, the most innovative and interesting hermeneutic perspectives on the role played by Italian culture in the Mediterranean area, emerging from a comparison between Montaigne and his sources.
- In this regard, it should be noted that, in the catalog of Montaigne, we find the *Historiale description de l'Afrique* of Leo Africanus (1556), who was born in Morocco, captured by Sicilian pirates, and lived in Italy at the court of Pope Leo X. Author of several works in the Arabic language before his arrival in Italy, he wrote *Della Descrizione dell'Africa e delle cose notabili che quivi sono* in Italian, which was translated into French in 1556.
- The observations on Venice, Rome and Ancona noted in the *Journal de voyage*, in which Montaigne detects the presence of various men and languages and a complex cultural stratification in the art and architecture of the places visited, can confirm this view of the Mediterranean area as a place characterized by the construction of new identities, which are never entirely definitive.