

Medieval inhibitions in re-inventing the Caspian Sea

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The far reaching novelty before the age of discovery was the re-invention of the Caspian sea as a landlocked sea. Until the midst of 13th century the antique concept prevailed according to which the Caspian Sea was a gulf, being an extension of the northern Ocean. The Caspian Gulf was marginalized and turned to be the enclosed habitat of Gog and Magog. As consequence the European horizon of Asia was reduced for almost thousand years. This paper aims to follow the stages of its re-invention since William Rusbruk conclusion (1254) that the ancient authorities were wrong and that the Caspian Sea is landlocked. Marco Polo, Hethom, and Marignolli reported later the same. This turning point attracted scholars like Jean Richard, Evelyn Edson, Natalie Bouloux and Emmanuelle Vagnon. It appears that various inhibitions prevented this experimental evidence to be widely accepted. Firstly, the medieval domination of *scriptura* over the *pictura* as von den Brincken has pledged for by quoting Gervais of Tilbury and Paolino Veneto.

Roger Bacon adopted Rusbruk's discovery in his *Opus Maius* within one decade. Seventy years after, Pietro Vesconte and Paolino Veneto introduced the landlocked Caspian Sea but depicted it twice without a stable name in their world maps. If to judge from the outline of the sea, it seems that they were inspired rather from Idrissi maps than from Rusbruks account. The same applies to the Catalan map. The dilemma whether to decide against classical authorities preoccupied early humanists like Petrarch and Boccaccio. Secondly, Margriet Hoogvliet countered the dichotomy of text against picture by arguing that maps are to be read like texts as reading and seeing are of the same order. Maps were designed to observe and contemplate on God's creation of the world and its nature, including its natives and monsters. This Christian outlook prevailed until the 17th century in maps and therefore Hoogvliet speaks of long middle Ages when it comes to cartography. Hence we find still the Caspian Sea connected to Ocean in several maps as late as this century.

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