

List of Participants and Their Topics

CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS

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Christian Giordano (University of Fribourg) - *The Mediterranean Historical Region: Economic, Socio-structural and Cultural Perspectives*

In his attempt to define Europe's historical regions, Jenö Szücs rather surprisingly overlooked the cultural, socio-structural and economic specificities of Euro-Mediterranean societies, thus omitting the existence of at least a fourth historical region. In our paper we will present the characteristics of the peripheral socio-economic structure based on specific forms of absentee latifundia that determined the culture and primarily the urban ideal shared by all its social classes including the subordinate one, i.e., peasantry. We shall then analyze the development in this European periphery of a political culture based on a deep-seated mistrust in the state's institutions, which is still noticeable in Euro-Mediterranean societies and due to specific historical experiences. Finally, we will show that Europe's borders in the Mediterranean area are not clearly defined since there is no distinct break in continuity between the Old Continent and the Arab World on the coasts of North Africa.

Eyüp Özveren (Department of Economics, Middle East Technical University) - *Of Addressors and Addressees that Point to a Moving Address in History: In Search of Lebanon and its Regional References*

Having been strongly influenced by Fernand Braudel, my own work reveals a preference for sea-biased definitions of historical geographical spaces as manifest in my writings on the various aspects of the Mediterranean world. Inspired by Braudel (and Bratianu), I have also attempted to develop a similar conception of the Black Sea world. Given the historical proclivity of sea for easy transport at low cost, inland naval zones have been particularly favorable to the development of large-scale division of labor and cultural exchange. This is why such an approach is particularly suited to political economic concerns.

As a skeptic of land-based geographical regional specifications, I now wish to approach how a cluster has emerged in the course of time with shifting constituent characterizations of essentially a more or less overlapping territory. I have in mind the geography that has been sometimes successively and often simultaneously characterized as the Holy Land, Levant, Fertile Crescent, Near East, Ottoman Middle East, Arab Middle East, Middle East, "South West Asia", and the Eastern Mediterranean. Shifts over time in the preferred labeling have much to do with the shifts in configuration of local, regional and global constellations of power. On the other side, synchronic conceptual rivalries are a manifestation of such power struggles at the discursive level. This particular geography lends itself easily to such an investigation precisely because it is in the immediate vicinity of the West as well as being host to the so-called cradle of our alleged common civilization.

I will not only dwell on above the macro level specification but also on a micro exemplification of how these characterizations have affected the historical constitution of a very problematic territorial entity, namely, Lebanon. Lebanon is a most convenient point of departure for exploring the macro processes of clustering at work in this particular geography with strong seismic properties. Lebanon is thus both the tip of the iceberg and the illustration of the problem of geographical tectonics in its most crystallized form. Nineteenth-century Lebanon, in particular can best be described as the Balkans of the Fertile Crescent in many ways. With its historical roots extended problematically backward to Phoenicia and its geographical roots cultivated in a regional palimpsest, Lebanon is a minute prism with a spectacular depth-of-vision through which the processes constitutive of the Middle East or Eastern Mediterranean at large can be effectively explored. The construction and deconstruction of our categories of geographical reference thus coincide in this case with the making and unmaking of Lebanon per se.

Patrick Sériot (Université de Lausanne) - *Is Ruthenia an European Region? (The paradox of language discussions as a criterion for defining collective identity)*

Central, Eastern and Balkan Europe have a linguistic bias to define collective identity, following a typically Humboldtian line of thought. From this point of view, Western Ukraine is not an easy region as far as collective identity is concerned : political projects for Transcarpathia and Eastern Galicia just depend on a linguistic approach to ethnicity. But is there something as a Ruthenian language (rusinska mova)? or is it a part of the Ukrainian language? An analysis of the arguments on linguistic belonging will try to figure out the philosophical, political and ideological representations which are the basis of the linguistic question in this fascinating region of Europe.

Mark Bassin (Center for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University) - *One Region - Many Meanings: The Multiple Faces of "Eurasia"*

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the curious toponym Eurasia has enjoyed a rather spectacular trajectory. From its obscure early life in the eccentric geo-historical musings of White-Russian émigré nationalists – whose manifestos from the 1920s and 1930s remained archival curiosities until perestroika – it quickly became something of an international fashion. Its conceptual and ideological elasticity, along with its utterly non-Soviet resonances, have made it a ubiquitous term of reference in public political discourses in post-Soviet Russia. Its enthusiasts today claim that it represents nothing less than the essential character of Russian nationhood as well as the direction of its future destiny. At the same time, the Eurasia idea—or ideal – has been taken up across the former Soviet Union beyond Russia, in Kazakhstan, Tatarstan, Yakutia and elsewhere. These Eurasias are clear alternatives to the Russian Eurasia: similar in certain respects but quite different in others. Their precise geographical boundaries do not coincide with that of Russian Eurasia – which itself is contested geographically, and in other ways as well. Finally, and most remarkably, the term has also been widely and enthusiastically adopted by Western academics and institutions. My paper will consider the different images and meanings that have been invested in this region, and try to relate them to shifting political, national and epistemological contexts over the past two decades.

Wolfgang Hoepken (University of Leipzig) - *Regions Lost? Global history and Southeastern Europe*

Alex Drace-Francis (University of Liverpool, School of History) - *Ottomans against Europeans?*

My paper would like to review recent discussions of spatial imaginings in Balkan and Ottoman historiography. On the one hand, a welcome phase of 'deconstruction' has questioned the oppositions between 'Balkan and European' spaces, as well as the older contrast between the European and the Ottoman worlds, thus integrating Balkan and Ottoman space within Europe. Nevertheless, this has left out the questions of a) how to discuss the possibility of very real conceptual contrasts between say, Ottoman and French spatial imaginings; and b) how to do comparisons of Balkan topics with extra-European cases. I will illustrate this problem with reference to my own attempts to compare Balkan autobiographical strategies with those from the post-Ottoman Middle East.

Henrik Stenius (University of Helsinki) - *Repetitive Uses of Concepts in the Nordic Countries. A Way of Exploring a Particular Historical Region*

Focusing on conceptual change and exploring original and innovative political thinking seems among contemporary conceptual historians to be more in fashion than analyzing repetitive uses of concepts. There are good reasons for this: when one starts looking for repetitive uses of concepts, one will have difficulties in acknowledging the contingent as well as the ambivalent and equivocal elements of political language; one is tempted to adjust interpretations to teleological narratives; and one cannot avoid reductionist thinking. We start asking why x says y, instead of asking what x really says. We become bad listeners. We choose our cases so that we can contextualize the utterance in terms of representations of political and social interests. We become blind for innovative openings.

Bearing these remarks in mind I will nevertheless argue that we need also to get a deeper understanding of repetitive uses of concepts. This is important so that we can identify the innovative openings. More importantly, this is crucial in order to better understand the spatial dimension of the use of concepts. There are different sorts of conceptual universes with their own patterns for how political key concepts are used. There is a European conceptual universe, there are language specific conceptual universes, there are polities (nations/states) with rather rigid conceptual universes, and – and this is the point in my argumentation – there are historical regions – like the Nordic countries – with their own conceptual universes.

My argument is that if you study repetitive uses of concepts you cannot avoid reductionist thinking, but this is not all that bad. In studying the repetitive use of concepts one cannot escape the feeling that there are specific Nordic uses of concepts like tolerance, opposition, state, citizen, opinion. Historical regions are constructed, but compared with the creation of political vocabularies for the nation states the sense of construction is less obvious and/or present. The specificities can be reduced to a large extent to the historical experiences and the future horizons of the historical agents living in the formative period triggered by the Reformation. With such an approach you can delineate the mental boundaries of the Nordic countries, a specific historical region.

Frithjof Benjamin Schenk (University of Basel, Switzerland) - *Russia – a Historical Region? Cultural Features and Imperial Legacies*

In this talk I would like to address the question whether Russia may be regarded as a historical meso-region in its own right as, for example, the traditional division of labour among historians of Central and Eastern European history in German speaking countries suggests. Here Russia still is regarded as „Eastern Europe in a proper sense”, a historical region, comprising more than Russia in its current political boundaries and a historical space which can be delineated from neighbouring meso-regions like „Central Europe“ or „South-Eastern Europe“. In a first part of my presentation I will briefly reflect on the concept of historical meso-regions („Geschichtsregionen“) from a methodological point of view and discuss the usefulness of this concept for the work of historians. A second part of my paper will be devoted to the question how Russia has been traditionally described in Western (and Russian) historiography as a historical region, taking a closer look at the contextualization of cultural features and imperial legacies.