

The Heritage from the seas....



From being Italian and somehow an immigrant myself I relate to Portugal and Portuguese culture from the standpoint of a foreigner, sometimes grateful to this hosting country and culture, sometimes comparing, sometimes admiring, and sometime resenting the fact that I cannot be immersed in my own culture, language and community. Anyhow, if we go back in history, Italian and Portuguese heritage do have some commonalities, which still manifest in the culture, language and way of socializing.



Map of Roman campaigns in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula. The purple line shows Brutus' campaign (138–136 BC). The yellow line shows Caesar's campaign (62 BC). The green lines and the red lines show the Cantabrian War (29–19 BC).

Both our countries are long stretches of land with a lot of exposure to the sea.



But while we settled for exploring the shores and boundaries of the enclosed and reassuring Mediterranean Sea, Portugal always faced the open much wilder waters of the Atlantic Oceans.



Everything is bigger there in the ocean, I used to hear when following my mum at the local fish monger in Italy, waves, fish, distances winds. Everything is wilder and dangerous. Now that I had several years of contact with the Portuguese culture I am starting to see how the oceans characteristics shaped this people and their culture.

Sailing off for the unknown, trips of discoveries, while not being entirely sure where these will end, if a steep and sharp waterfall would fall off the end of the world, or if the vessels would end up hitting the same shores after circumnavigating a round earth...



A

B

C

A) *Portugal* by [Waghenaer](#) (1584). The publication of Waghenaer's *De Spiegel der Zeevaerdt* (1584) is widely considered as one of the most important developments in the history of [nautical cartography](#).

Waghenaer is one of the founding fathers and most famous members of the North Holland school, which played a major role in the [early development of Dutch nautical chart-making](#). Between 1550 and 1579, Waghenaer sailed the seas as a chief officer. During these years he must have been in contact with Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian seafarers.

B) Modern version of the Roman [Tabula Peutingeriana](#) (5th century). c) [Al-Masudi](#)'s world map (10th century)



A

B

A) Surviving fragment of the [first World Map](#) of [Piri Reis](#) (1513) showing parts of the [Americas](#).

B) The [Tabula Rogeriana](#), drawn by [Muhammad al-Idrisi](#) for [Roger II of Sicily](#) in 1154. Note that the north is at the bottom, and so the map appears "upside down" compared to modern [cartographic](#) conventions.

The age of the Portuguese great discoveries is a striking moment for global histories. It resonates adventure, freedom but also slavery, bravery but also cruelty, fear and courage at the same time. It is a rich moment of history, complex to unpack, but fascinating to engage with and understand how it resonates in all of pasts and presents.

The sheer size of a grilled squid in an Azorean restaurant on San Miguel island, reminded me of all this.

