

*Limits: The Pillars of Hercules from Sicily to Gibraltar*

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Throughout antiquity the formidable frontier represented by the Pillars of Hercules was situated at the Strait of Sicily, where Sicily and Tunisia seem about to link up. It was only in the Hellenistic period that this symbolic frontier was moved and sited at Gibraltar. This is the argument put forward in an extremely original book by Sergio Frau, who is well known for his journeys through space and time.

When the world 'gets broader' it is more or less inevitable that its imaginary borders should also be pushed back. A famous topic in 'eristics' (*suasoria*, a kind of declamatory speech practised by the Romans, whose purpose was to persuade – French translator's note), or dramatic eloquence, which was set in Rome in the great schools of rhetoric, was formulated as follows: 'Persuade Alexander the Great not to go beyond the borders of the world.' A fine *a posteriori* exercise that includes an important element: after Alexander, and because of his march to Afghanistan, the world had become bigger. The spin-off from that spectacular march was characterized by a comparable shift of the western 'border' further west. It is no coincidence that it is in fact to Eratosthenes – in other words, a man who is emblematic of the science of the third century before Christ, the science that was dominant in the world resulting from Alexander's conquests – that we owe the 'slippage' of the Pillars of Hercules from the Strait of Sicily to Gibraltar. This scientific event is symptomatic. It confirms what we sense in other areas too. That in this way, though Alexander's conquests were directed towards the east, they also had consequences for the other half of the Mediterranean. Particularly cultural consequences (Hellenism in original guises reached this part of the Mediterranean as well), but also political and more strictly scientific consequences. Frau's research has that lapel-grabbing tone characteristic of books in which the authors involve themselves totally.

Luciano Canfora

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*The Riddle of the Pillars . . . or the mystery of a frontier separating two identities*

Sergio F. Donadoni, Egyptologist, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

This is a curious book. As much because of what it says as the manner in which it says it.

It reveals the mechanism (born of a mixture of curiosity, uncertainty and daring) that governed its conception and significance, by going back over each stage of its development as it presented itself in the mind and imagination (and from a certain point in the consciousness) of its author. It seems to be a 'secret book' which he takes pleasure in trying to explain – a bit like an alexandrine – in a public forum. At home I have a clock that shows behind glass, at the opposite end to the face displaying the time, the working of the pendulum, wheels and works and the toothed cogs that make up the gearing, where the various elements combine to create a coherent movement. This might be a good metaphor, I was about to say 'for this book', but I would prefer to say 'for this experiment', which is both intellectual and moral.