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Cristoforo Buondelmonti: Greek Antiquities in Florentine Humanism

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CRISTOFORO BUONDELMONTI:
GREEK ANTIQUITIES IN FLORENTINE HUMANISM*

Benedetta Bessi

Abstract: With his *Descriptio insulae Cretae* and *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, Cristoforo Buondelmonti initiated the isolario tradition in the early fifteenth century. Both works were inspired by his urge to recover Greek and Roman antiquity through the "restoration" of ancient geography and the study of ancient material remains. The article aims to contextualize Buondelmonti's antiquarian surveys and erudite compilation methods, as expressions of the efforts of early fifteenth-century Florentine Humanism to reassess the ancient heritage of Crete and the Greek islands.

Since the beginning of modern archaeological research in the Aegean, Cristoforo Buondelmonti's descriptions and maps of the various islands have often represented the starting point for any scholar interested in reconstructing the history of a specific island and verifying the preservation state of its monuments as recorded by him in the early fifteenth century. However, for a more thorough evaluation of Buondelmonti and his work in the context of early fifteenth-century scholarship, the greatest problem one has to face is the lack of modern and philologically accurate editions of his texts.

Both the *Descriptio Cretae* (1417) and even more the *Liber insularum* (1420) enjoyed immediate popularity and circulated in Italy, the rest of Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean in several manuscript versions, which also included translations into Greek, vernacular Italian, French and English. While the *Descriptio Cretae* was first published by Flaminius Cornaro in 1755 and more recently by van Spitael in 1981,[1] the only printed editions of the *Liber*

* I would like to express my gratitude to George Tolias for the patience and friendship demonstrated to me in the past few years. The present paper is part of a larger research project on Cristoforo Buondelmonti and his *Liber insularum*, which has been supported by the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University with a post-doctoral fellowship (Mary Seeger O'Boyle Fellowship, 2005-2006) and by the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation with a research scholarship in 2007.

[1] Flaminius Cornaro, *Creta Sacra*, Vol. I, Venice 1755; Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *Descriptio insulae Cretae*, ed. Marie-Anne van Spitael, Heraklion: Association for the Cultural Development of Heraklion, 1981.

insularum date back to the nineteenth century.[2] Yet, none of these editions is exact, as they were based only on a limited portion of the manuscript tradition available for each text and were prepared without following precise philological criteria. In the early twenty-first century there has been a revival of interest in and studies of Cristoforo Buondelmonti, including the preparation of a forthcoming critical synoptic edition of the four different versions of the *Liber insularum* by the Italian scholar Giuseppe Ragone.[3]

As a Classical archaeologist, I am particularly interested in Cristoforo Buondelmonti and his role as a pioneer in the rediscovery of Greek antiquities and a forerunner of modern archaeological research; and my own approach has been to concentrate on a short commentary of his *Liber insularum*. While I am fully aware of the philological uncertainty of the existing editions of this work and confidently await the appearance of the imminent critical edition, I am also convinced that such a commentary is not necessarily a secondary step, but can rather be a working tool for philologists in their close examination of the various passages. In this article I do not offer an introduction to Cristoforo Buondelmonti and the many questions about his personality and work, for which I refer the interested reader to the recent bibliography,[4] but I will rather present a series of reflections on the path-breaking role of this scholar and traveller in the history of archaeology, not only of Greece but as a discipline at large.

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[2] Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *"Librum insularum Archipelagi" e codicibus Parisinis regiis nunc primum totum edidit, praefatione et annotazione instruxit G. R. L. de Sinner*, ed. Ludovicus de Sinner, Leipzig and Berlin: G. Reimer, 1824; *id.*, *Description des îles de l'Archipel par Christophe Buondelmonti. Version grecque par un anonyme, publiée d'après le manuscrit du Sèrail etc.*, ed. É. Legrand, Paris: Publications de l'École des Langues Orientales, 1897.

[3] Claudia Barsanti, "Costantinopoli e l'Egeo nei primi decenni del XV secolo. La testimonianza di Cristoforo Buondelmonti", *RIASA* 56 (2001), pp. 83-254; Giuseppe Ragone, "Il *Liber insularum Archipelagi* di Cristoforo dei Buondelmonti. Filologia del testo, filologia dell'immagine", *Humanisme et culture géographique à l'époque du concile de Constance autour de Guillaume Fillastre. Actes du Colloque de l'Université de Reims, 18-19 novembre 1999*, ed. Didier Marcotte, Turnhout: Brepols, 2002, pp. 177-217; Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Archipelagi. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf Ms. G 13*, facsimile, ed. Irmgard Siebert and Max Plassmann, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005; *id.*, *Liber insularum Archipelagi. Transkription des Exemplars Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf Ms. G 13*, transl. and commentary Karl Bayer, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007.

[4] See note 3 above.

Buondelmonti's engagement in the activity of manuscript hunting, so characteristic of the early Florentine Humanist milieu, is a well-known fact and, although no direct evidence of his involvement in art collecting is available, he seems to have shared a similar interest in the visual culture of antiquity. On visiting the island of Sifnos, he observed: "Pan was worshipped as God of Nature, and represented in a destroyed statue in an elevated place. But after St Paul and the other apostles passed from here preaching the divine word, all the statues were destroyed."[5] His remarks on ancient sculptures falling into ruin following the prediction of Paul and the other apostles very closely recall similar observations by early Humanists such as Lorenzo Ghiberti and Leon Battista Alberti.

The iconoclastic bigotry of the early Christians was a relevant topos in the Humanist debate on the decline of ancient art, and Renaissance artists and theorists identified in it the main cause of the disruption of the Classical tradition and the decline of sculpture. Erwin Panofsky called this "the theory of internal suppression" as opposed to "the theory of external devastation", which conversely lays more stress on barbarian invasions and their role in the destruction of ancient buildings.[6] Buondelmonti's awareness of the latest developments in the artistic and cultural debate in Florentine Humanist circles, which gave great importance to the recovery of ancient art, can therefore possibly explain his interest in Classical art and his sensibility to the *disiecta membra* of ancient monuments.

In several passages describing his visits to Crete, Buondelmonti expressed sorrow for the state of abandonment of the ancient cities and art treasures:

> While we were contemplating these [marvels], we entered the ancient harbour of Penix, nowadays called Loutro, and we saw a ruined city of the utmost antiquity with its pillars [thrown] on the ground. Among them and by the humble houses of the peasants we found sepulchres made of the most white marble; swine were fed in them and were scratching the magnificent sculptures which decorated their perimeter. I saw a lot of statue busts lacerated and mutilated, and among them marble monuments were lying here and there.[7]

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[5] "Pan etiam his Deus naturae colebatur et in sublimiori loco statua deleta demonstratur. Sed postquam Paulus et reliqui Apostolorum verbum divinum per has praedicavere contratas, omnia idola ruere.", Buondelmonti, *Librum*, p. 83.

[6] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960, pp. 25-27.

[7] "Donec talia cernimus, in portum olim Penicis, hodie Lutro, intravisimus et destructam civitatem vetustissimamque cum columnis prostrate videmus. Inter eas

And further: "Let all Cretans weep before such a ruin, and women, with their hair undone, tear their own bosom."[8] Conversely, he expressed great admiration for demonstrations of interest and care of antiquities, as is well illustrated by his description of the ancient sculpture collection in the villa of the Venetian nobleman Niccolò Corner in eastern Crete:

> There nearby we saw Pidiata, a citadel surrounded by fertile fields. In the countryside, in the north we saw the bishopric of Chirsonesus, which we visited, and in the south we noticed the bishopric of Archadia. Then, progressing towards the east, in a valley, I made the acquaintance of the noble and erudite Lord Nicolaus, descendant of the Scipions family. He has no heir and lives in a garden like Paradise, adorned with many ancient marbles. He poses on a pedestal every statue that he discovers in the bushes and finds it to his taste, and there are plenty of them. He takes pleasure reading Latin books and has sometimes a work of Dante in his hands. A vivid source of water springs from the mouth of a marble figure; to the left of it, the ancestors of my host posed the busts of Marc Antony and Pompeius. There I saw pretty marbles brought from every kind of building.[9]

Buondelmonti's notice not only offers witness to one of the earliest-known collections of ancient sculpture, but it also documents a prelude to the most famous Renaissance villas and gardens conceived as *loci amoeni* and inspired by the evocative descriptions of Pliny and other ancient authors.[10]

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candidissimi marmoreis sepulcra prope casa illorum rusticorum, inveni; in quibus sues polentum comedebant et sculpturas circum nobilissimas laniabant. Lacerata et fracta multa vidi busta ydolorum et, intra marmorum hedifitia, sparsa iacebant.", Buondelmonti, *Descriptio*, 251-256.

[8] "Plangant de tali destructione Cretensens omnes et mulieres crinibus sparsis laniare fatigant.", *Ibid*., 896.

[9] "Ibique prope eam Pidiata oppidum in fertilissimo campo apparet. Ad septentrionem autem in rure quodam Chirsonensem episcopatum prospicimus ac etiam visitamus; quo viso ad austrum Archadensem Episcopatum procuramus ab alto. Post hec ad orientem uergens, in valle quidam nobilem et scientificum dominum Nicolaum ex origine Scipionum ortum invenio qui sine prole viridarium simile paradiso sculpturis marmoreis antiquissimis adornavit et aedificari fecit inique quisquid corpus in arboribus delectamini sumit reperitur habunde. Ipse in latinis delectatur libri set Dnatem in manibus aliquando tenet. De ore marmoris hominis uiuus emanat fons. Ad dexteram atque levam Marci Antoni caput et Pompei patres posuere. Ibi marmora pulchra cognomi, que ab aliis hedifitiis traslata fuere.", *Ibid*., 877-889.

[10] Luigi Beschi, "La scoperta dell'arte greca", *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana*, ed. S. Settis, Turin: Einaudi, 1986, Vol. III, pp. 293-372, esp. p. 320; *id*., "Antiquarian Research in Greece during the Renaissance: Travellers and Collectors", *In the Light of Apollo:*

However, Buondelmonti's sensibility towards antiquities goes well beyond an antiquarian interest in collecting, and most striking are his personally observed verifications and his efforts to reconstruct the original context of ancient monuments and objects, qualities that characterize him as an archaeologist *ante litteram*.

The most famous of Buondelmonti's archaeological enterprises is connected to his visit to Delos, where, with the aid of his crew and some ropes, he tried without success to lift up and set back in place the colossal archaic statue of Apollo:

> We saw in Delos, in a plain, an old temple constructed with many pillars and a statue lying on the ground, so big that there was no way for us all, although we were a thousand [men], to restore it with the ropes and the machines of the galleys, so we left it in its place.[11]

For Rhodes, the island he had chosen as the main base for his Aegean explorations and where he stated he resided for eight years, Buondelmonti gave proof of great topographical accuracy when describing the circuit of the ancient fortification wall:

> […] like a shield was surrounding, from St Stephen to St John of the Lepers and St Anthony and St Callinicus and from hence back to the prior mentioned Saint [Stephen]. And on its length there were two hundred towers as recorded in the chronicles, each one of fifty cubits high.[12]

Although there is no exact match in the ancient sources, the reference to the form of a shield reveals itself as correct when compared with Diodorus (XIX.45, XX.83), who described the city as *θεατροειδής* [theatrical].

Buondelmonti began describing the circuit of the fortifications from the south-west (St Stephen) and then continued to the south-east (St John), north-east (St Anthony) and north-west (St Callinicus). The no longer extant

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Italian Renaissance and Greece, 22 December 2003 - 31 March 2004, ed. Mina Gregori, Athens: The Hellenic Culture Organization, 2003, pp. 46-52, esp. p. 47; Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 80-81.

[11] "Igitur in Delo, prope olim templum vetustum, in plano, praeparatum colomnarum idolum videmus, quod in tanta magnitudine iacet, quod nullo modo nos, qui mille fuimus, erigere potuimus argumentis rudentum galearum, sed ad suum pristinum dimisimus locum.", Buondelmonti, *Librum*, p. 92.

[12] "[…] ad modum scuti ampliabatur a Sancto Stephano usque ad Sanctum Iohannem Leprosorum et Sanctum Antonium et Sanctum Callinicum, et, ad primum redeundo sanctum, circumdabat. Quo in circuitu turres ducentae erant, ut in chronica habetur, quarum qualibet cubitorum quinquaginta erigebatur," *Ibid*., p. 72.

medieval church of St Stephen stood on the hill corresponding to the ancient acropolis of the city of Rhodes (today also known as Monte Smith).[13] The church of St John corresponds to an underground chapel situated in the suburban area of Mitropolis outside the eastern medieval city wall. Whereas today we know that at its south-east corner the ancient city extended further south and that the Rodini Stream marked the limit of its expansion, Buondelmonti's assumption might have been based on remains of walls such as those found in the area of Akandia Bay.[14]

The church of St Anthony, intentionally destroyed after it had been used by the Turks for their attack on the tower of St Nicholas in 1480, had been described by Niccolò da Martoni during his visit in 1395 and it stood, near the Mandraki port, in the area which was subsequently occupied by the Murad Reis Mosque.[15] At the beginning of the twentieth century, St Callinicus was a toponym still in use to refer to an artificial mound occupied by a Turkish cemetery, not far from the little church of St Nicholas in the western suburb of Neomaras.[16]

Except, as mentioned above, for the south-east corner, where the ancient city extended further inland than indicated by the Florentine traveller (and we have seen how we can justify his wrong assumption), for the other corners

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[13] Giuseppe Gerola, "I monumenti medievali delle Tredici Sporadi", *Annuario della Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene e delle missioni italiane in oriente* 1 (1914), pp. 169-356, esp. p. 274; *id*., "Le Tredici Sporadi nel Codice Classense di Cristoforo Buondelmonti", *Atti e memorie della R. deputazione di storia patria per le provincie di Romagna*, series IV, IV, 1-3 (1913-1914), pp. 450-484, esp. p. 460. For the ancient monuments brought to light in the area, see Monica Livadiotti and Giorgio Rocco (eds), *La presenza italiana nel Dodecaneso tra il 1912 e il 1948. La ricerca archeologica, la conservazione, le scelte progettuali*, Catania: Edizioni del Prisma, 1996, pp. 12-23. For remains of the fortifications identified in the area, see Melina M. Philimonos-Tsopotou, *Η ελληνιστική οχύρωση της Ρόδου* [The Hellenistic fortification of Rhodes], Athens: Archaeological Receipts Fund, 2004, pp. 70-71, appendix 1, nos 22-24.

[14] Gerola, "I monumenti medievali", p. 274; *id*., "Le Tredici Sporadi", esp. p. 460. For the fortification wall identified in the Akandia Bay area, see Philimonos-Tsopotou, *Η ελληνιστική οχύρωση*, pp. 81-83, appendix 1, nos 1-4.

[15] Gerola, "I monumenti medievali"; Albert Gabriel, *La cité de Rhodes, MCCCX-MDXXII*, Paris: E. de Boccard, 1921, p. 14; Ioannis Papachristodoulou (ed.), *Ancient Rhodes, 2400 years*, Vol. II, Athens: Ministry of Culture, 2000, p. 296, with map of the medieval city of Rhodes, no. 32. For the stretches of the Hellenistic fortifications identified by L. Laurenzi in the area, see Philimonos-Tsopotou, *Η ελληνιστική οχύρωση*, pp. 46-47, appendix 1, nos 10-11.

[16] Gerola, "Le Tredici Sporadi", p. 460. For the fortifications identified in this area, see Philimonos-Tsopotou, *Η ελληνιστική οχύρωση*, pp. 135-136, appendix 1, nos 18-21.

Buondelmonti's indications find a very close comparison with the actual perimeter of the ancient city wall as it has been possible to reconstruct on the basis of modern archaeological investigations. His accuracy in describing masonry and building techniques is also evident in his description of an ancient wall that separated the island of Rhodes through its entire width: "On the east and down to the sea, a wall constructed with enormous square stones starting, as they say, from the mountains and the valleys, splitting the island in two, denoting hence that there were two domains of two lords."[17] Gerola stated that he was not able to identify this wall and therefore dismissed the information as pure invention.[18] On the other hand, Buondelmonti's use of a very concrete and technical terminology in describing the building technique – *lapidum quadratarum*, recalling to mind the *opus quadratum* – seems to suggest that he was indeed referring to some real structure he had seen. The wall represented on the maps as separating the island widthways makes a striking comparison with the division line that marked the boundaries of the three archaic centres of the island and, although not necessarily preserved in its entirety, its existence might have been suggested to Buondelmonti by some remains of an early date, as well as by the confused echo of sinecism.

A similar accuracy in describing building techniques is also revealed when Buondelmonti reported on his visit to the peak sanctuary on Mount Juktas (see fig. 1) in Crete: "[…] we found enormous ordered blocks of stone, which we thought were not made by human hands […]".[19] This description clearly refers to the impressive analemma wall, which, on the south and east side of the temenos, had always been visible even before the modern excavation brought to light its entire perimeter.[20] The consideration of the difficulty of crediting such a work to human agency echoes very closely the expression "Cyclopic work" employed by modern archaeologists to label the huge block masonry of the Bronze Age.

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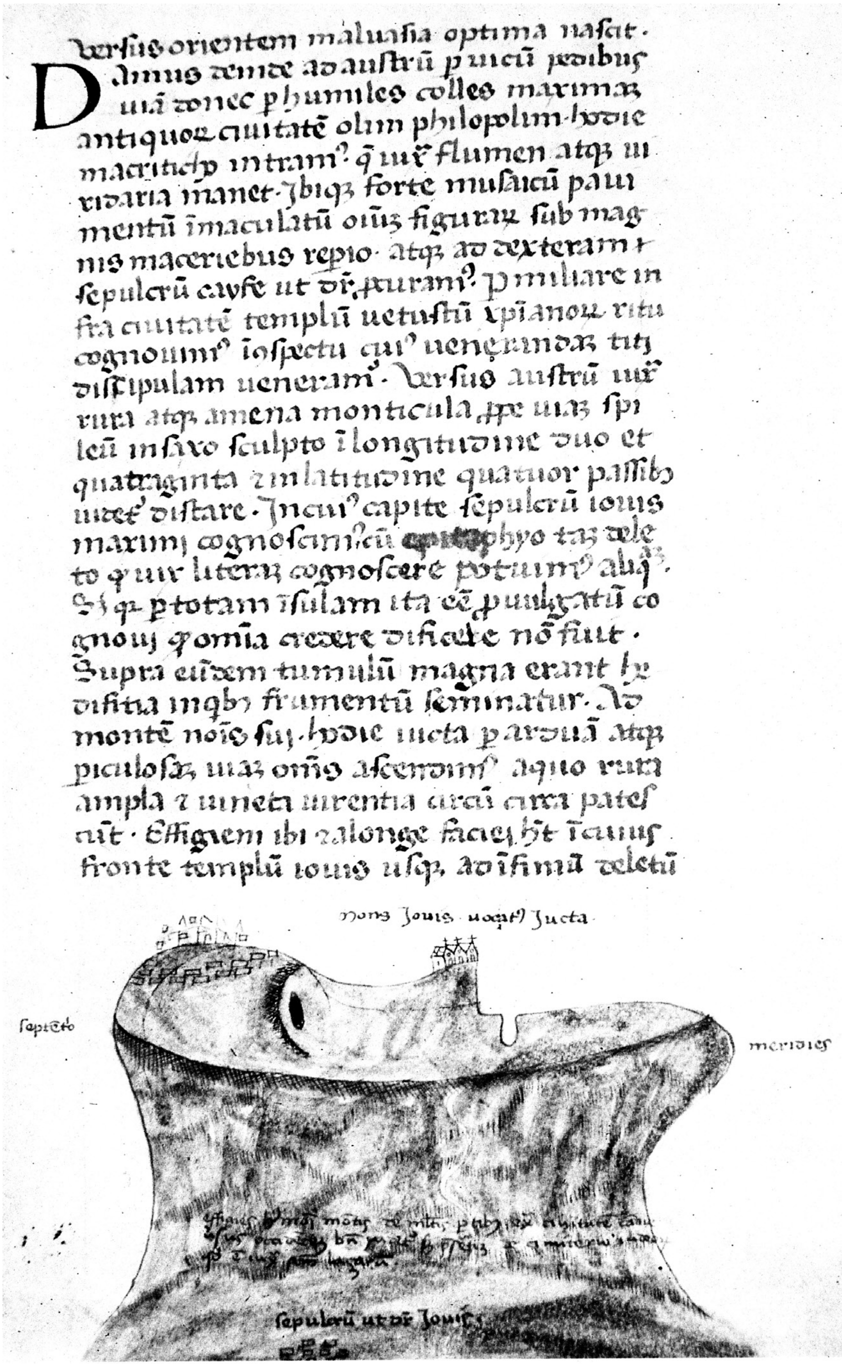
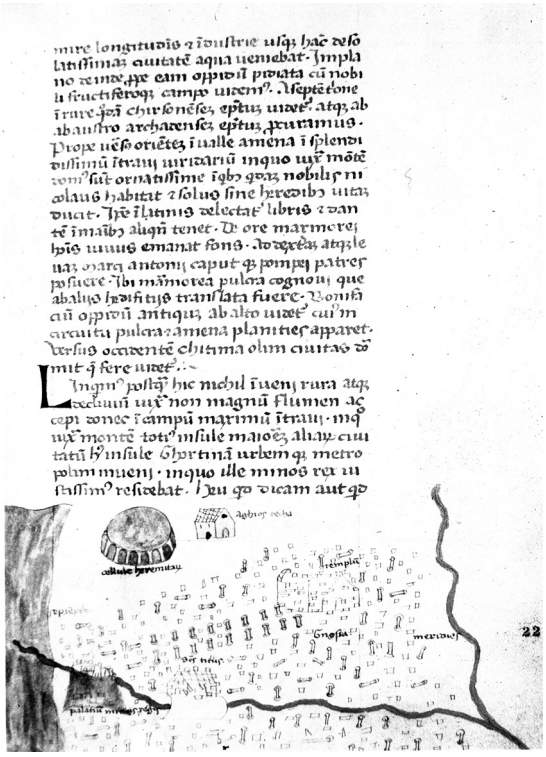
[17] "Ad orientem vero prope salo murus immanium lapidum quadratarum per montesque valles, ut aiunt, inceptabat, et insulam dividebat, et sic indicat duorum dominorum fuisse dominium.", Buondelmonti, *Librum*, p. 73.

[18] Gerola, "Le Tredici Sporadi", p. 462. The corresponding passage in the version of the Classensis manuscript (Ravenna, Biblioteca Civica Classense, ms. lat. 308) is even more detailed and its tone less doubtful.

[19] "[…] seriatimque moles reperimus quarum fabricatorem non humanum fuisse censemus […]", Buondelmonti, *Descriptio*, 702-703.

[20] Evangelos Kiriakidis, *Ritual in the Bronze Age Aegean: The Minoan Peak Sanctuaries*, London: Duckworth, 2005.


versus orientem maluasia optima nascitur.
Dimisso demum ad austrum per vicum pedibus
viam donec per humiles colles maximam
antiquorum civitatem olim philopolim hodie
maceriis intramus quae iuxta flumen atque in
ripa manet. Ibique forte musaicum pavi
mentum immaculatum omnibus figuris sub mag
nis maceriebus reperio. atque ad dexteram et
sepulcrum causae ut dicitur procuramus. Per miliare in
fra civitatem templum vetustum christianorum ritu
cognovimus in aspectu cuius venerandam titi
discipulam veneramur. Versus austrum iuxta
rura atque amena monticula prope viam spi
leum in saxo sculpto in longitudine duo et
quadraginta et in latitudine quatuor passibus
videtur distare. In cuius capite sepulcrum iovis
maximi cognoscimus cum epitaphyo tamen dele
to quia vix literas cognoscere potuimus aliquas.
Dicitur quod per totam insulam ita esse publicatum co
gnovi quod omnia credere difficile non fuit.
Supra eundem tumulum magna erant hy
difitia in quibus frumentum seminatur. Ad
montem nominis sui hodie iucta parvum atque
periculosam viam omnino ascendimus a quo rura
ampla et vineta virentia circum circa patefi
unt. Effigiem ibi a longe facies habet et timus
fronte templum iovis usque ad infimum deletum



Figs 1-2. Cristoforo Buondelmonti, Mount Juktas and the ruins of Gortys. *Descriptio insulae Cretae*, *c.* 1417-1422. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, XXIX 42, f. 18 [Mount Juktas], f. 22 [Gortys] (early fifteenth-century copy).

One further example of Buondelmonti's interest in technical details is offered by his visit to the Roman city of Gortys (see fig. 2): "Almost in the middle, at the south-east, we discovered the walls built of bricks of a magnificent temple and we measured their height."[21] Although the very tall building described and measured by Buondelmonti was very likely not a temple but part of the bath complex known as the Megali Porta in the reports of later visitors and travellers, the fact that he did not fail to note the use of brick is revealing of the author's attention to technical details.[22] The extensive use of brick is in fact one peculiarity of the Roman buildings of Gortys,

[21] "In medio quoque, inter orientem et meridiem, coctilibus muris templum superbum inveneramus et eius altitudinem numeramus.", Buondelmonti, *Descriptio*, 902-904.

[22] Nicolò Masturzo and Chiara Tarditi, "Monumenti pubblici di Gortina Romana. Le terme della Megali Porta e i templi gemelli", *ASAA* 72-73 (1994-1995), pp. 225-329.

capital of the Roman province of Crete and Cyrene, when compared with the majority of other sites Buondelmonti might have visited on Crete and the rest of the Greek islands, where the use of ashlar block masonry, in line with the Greek building tradition, remained dominant well into the Roman period.

In both the *Descriptio Cretae* and the *Liber*, Buondelmonti often made reference to archaeological discoveries of statues, mosaics, vases and coins. Although sometimes in the face of his apparently boasting language one would be tempted to dismiss Buondelmonti's claims as exaggerations in the same vein as medieval *mirabilia*, a considered analysis of his descriptions reveals that he was in reality more accurate and reliable than we might expect. Referring again to his paragraph on Rhodes, an island with which he was particularly well acquainted, he described a recent discovery of not less than 500 idols found in the vineyard of the church of St Anthony: "Even recently, close to St Anthony the Saviour, were found five hundred statues of all kinds in the pit of a vineyard."[23] Beschi suggested in Buondelmonti's notice an exaggerated echo of the discovery of "cento statue in marmo integre e bellissime" found in a cave on Rhodes and mentioned in a letter sent by Poggio Bracciolini to Niccolò Niccoli in 1430, reflecting the information received by Poggio from Francesco da Pistoia, his personal antique hunter based on the island.[24] However, in my opinion, the date of this letter is much too late to be referring to the same discovery mentioned by Buondelmonti in the *Liber* already as early as 1420, and this even if supposing a certain gap between the discovery itself and the composition of the letter by Poggio. If the notice by the friar reported in Bracciolini's letter is reliable, I see it more likely to refer to the discovery of one of the many grottoes and rock-cut tombs located in the suburban area of the ancient city and richly decorated with sculpture of different types.[25]

As for the discovery reported by Buondelmonti, there are other considerations to be made on the basis of the textual indications he provided. Even if the church of St Anthony – in whose vineyard the discovery took place – had been intentionally destroyed, its original location is well known

[23] "Nunc etiam de novo, prope Sanctum Antonium Salvatorem in vinea quadam quingenta idola omnium manierum in fovea reperta sunt.", Buondelmonti, *Librum*, pp. 72-73.

[24] Beschi, "La scoperta dell'arte greca", p. 322.

[25] H. Lauter, "Kunst und Landshaft. Ein Beitrag zum rhodischen Hellenismus," *Antike Kunst* 15 (1972), pp. 49-59; E. E. Rice, "Grottoes on the Acropolis of Hellenistic Rhodes", *BSA* 90 (1995), pp. 383-404.

(see above).[26] Furthermore, Buondelmonti, to describe where the objects were found, used the term "fovea", etymologically connected to favissa, the term used even by modern archaeologists to indicate votive deposits.[27]

The relatively recent discovery by the Greek Archaeological Service of several favissae, or votive deposits, containing innumerable terracotta statuettes connected to the cult of Demeter, exactly in the area indicated by Buondelmonti, is therefore not surprising. The sanctuary of Demeter has been identified in the remains brought to light in the area, which had been subsequently occupied by a medieval church and its properties.[28] If we accept this hypothesis, the "500 idols" of Buondelmonti's text, far from being an exaggeration, appear much more plausible and confirm the reliability of his eye-witness accounts.

A very similar discovery may be imagined when, in his description of Crete, Buondelmonti mentioned his visit to the temple on top of Mount Juktas and claimed: "[…] I recognized the temple of Jupiter torn down to its foundations. Around it we saw a great number of *imagines* and orderly stones."[29] Buondelmonti's wrong assumption that the ruins, in reality part of a Minoan peak sanctuary, referred to a temple of Zeus reflects the local tradition according to which Mount Juktas was the burial place of this divinity. Nevertheless, the description deserves some consideration. Van Spitael, in her 1981 edition of the *Descriptio Cretae*, translated *infinatas imagines* as "un grand nombre de statues". However, Buondelmonti was probably not referring to life-size statues (something too hard to believe even for the warmest supporters of Buondelmonti's reliability), but rather to

[26] See note 15 above.

[27] Charles du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis*, Paris 1678, s.v. "fovea", Vol. III, p. 582: "thesaurus in terra inventus".

[28] The area of this ancient sanctuary corresponds exactly to the location of the medieval church; see A. Giannikouri, "Το ιερό της Δήμητρος στην πόλη της Ρόδου" [The sanctuary of Demeter in the city of Rhodes], *Ancient Rhodes, 2400 years*, Vol. I, ed. I. Papachristodoulou, Athens: Ministry of Culture, 1993, pp. 63-72. For the terracotta figurines, see H. Zervoudaki, "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Terrakotten aus dem Demeter Heiligtum der Stadt Rhodos", *Archaeology in the Dodecanese*, ed. Søren Dietz and Ioannis Papachristodoulou, Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1988, pp. 127-137.

[29] "[…] templum Jovis usque ad fundamenta deletum cognovi. In circuitu ejus infinitas imagines seriatimque moles reperimus.", Buondelmonti, *Descriptio*, 701-702 (wrong translation by van Spitael as "Tout autour, nous trouvons un grand nombre de statues et d'enormes blocs de pierre disperses.").

terracotta idols from the Middle Minoan I temple, which, we know, were still visible in great quantity at the time of Arthur Evans' visit.[30]

While Buondelmonti's interest in the physical remains of Classical antiquity, together with his attempts to restore and insert them back in their original context, qualify him as a pioneer in field archaeology, more problematic is the question of the mythological descriptions of pagan gods and goddesses, which often follow the mention of ancient statues that he claimed to have seen during his visits. The list includes Venus on Kythera, Pan on Sifnos, Apollo on Serifos, Mercury on Andros, Bacchus on Naxos, Cybele on Milos, Minerva on Karpathos, and Juno on Samos.[31] The patent literary character of these digressions legitimizes their irrelevance to the original on-site observations. Moreover, the many versions of the *Liber insularum* and the rich manuscript tradition make it very hard to assess at which stage these digressions might have been inserted in the book and whether they represent additions by Buondelmonti himself in an attempt to enrich his own first-hand material or whether they are rather to be considered interpolations by a later copyist or commentator.

Basing my observations on the paragraph on Serifos, for which Giuseppe Ragone has kindly provided the text of the four editions, it seems that these mythological asides are found in all three longer versions (Scilic. 1420, 1422 and 1430), but they are missing in the shorter version. This last exists in its entirety in only one manuscript presently in a private collection, and Hilary Turner identified it with the original version dating to before 1420, hitherto considered lost.[32] Analyzing the passages of the *Liber* they are part of, it also becomes

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[30] Arthur J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. I, London: Macmillan & Co., 1923, p. 158: "This great ash altar, answering to that of Petsofa, contained similar votive relics, including male and female figures of clay, together with those of animals, such as oxen and goats, and also separate limbs, both human and animal."

[31] Buondelmonti, *Librum*, p. 64 (Kythera, Venus); p. 70 (Karpathos, Minerva); p. 83 (Sifnos, Pan); pp. 83-84 (Serifos, Apollo); p. 92 (Milos, Cybele); p. 87 (Andros, Mercury); pp. 96-97 (Naxos, Bacchus); pp. 108-109 (Samos, Juno).

[32] Hilary Louise Turner, "Christopher Buondelmonti and the Isolario", *Terrae Incognitae* 19 (1987), pp. 11-28; *id*., "Chios and Christopher Buondelmonti's Liber Insularum", *Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Εταιρείας της Ελλάδος* 30 (1987), pp. 47-71. A cross-reference with a manuscript referred to by van Spitael allowed Laura Cassi and Adele Dei, "Le esplorazioni vicine Geografia e letteratura negli 'Isolari'", *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 1 (1993), pp. 205-269, esp. p. 212, to identify it with the manuscript belonging at the time to the private collection of Ing. André Morf, Ennetbaden (Argovia). The manuscript that corresponds to the one on sale by Hoepli in 1931 also contained a copy of the *Descriptio Cretae* and the *Itinerarium Antonini* and had been the property of Jacopo Spinola, *utriusque*

clear that, at least in some cases, their insertion is in fluid continuity with the mention of the cult or of the statue of the divinity being discussed, and it is hard to conceive of them as later interpolations: "There Apollo is worshipped as an infant, and other times in old age. A golden tripod at the head, a quiver and a bow with arrows in one hand and a guitar in the other […]"[33]

The case of Serifos/Apollo, as well as the majority of the other examples bearing witness to cults and monuments not otherwise attested to, rule out the suspect arising from more expectable cases, such as the existence of the sanctuary of Juno on Samos or the special connection between Bacchus and Naxos, on the basis of which we could think that Buondelmonti's associations are just an echo of well-known facts mentioned in the literary sources. However, in this case, Buondelmonti's descriptions are of no help, should someone wish to reconstruct the iconographical type of the statues he described, because, as Mitchell has already recognized, these descriptions have a direct derivation from medieval mythographers with very close resonance to Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* and from a slightly later non-moralizing extract known as the *Libellus de deorum imaginibus*.[34]

In spite of their medieval origin, the popularity of these works within early Humanist circles is revealed by the many manuscript copies which were still made in the fifteenth century. Particularly interesting both because of its visual renderings of such mythological descriptions and because of its chronological vicinity to Buondelmonti's own work is the manuscript Reginensis 1290 from the Vatican Library, containing an illustrated version of the *Libellus* dating to about 1420.[35] This text and its illustrations offer therefore

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iuris doctor. The most recent reference to the destiny of this manuscript is found in Ragone, "Il *Liber insularum*", p. 196, note 61, where it is indicated as having been sold in an auction by Sotheby's, London, on 10 December 1996.

[33] "In qua Apollo colebatur in puerili forma et quidam in senili [very likely to be corrected as iuvenili]. In capite tripodam auream, in manu pharetram et sagittam cum arcu, in altera citharam tenebat […]", Buondelmonti, *Librum*, pp. 83-84.

[34] C. Mitchell, "Ex libris Kiriaci Anconetani", *Italia medievale e umanistica* (1963), pp. 263-299, esp. p. 298, although it is not true that the "caput caninum" does not find comparison with the above-mentioned texts. On Pierre Bersuire and his work, see Fausto Ghisalberti, "L''Ovidius moralizatus' di Pierre Bersuire", *Studi Romanzi* (1933), pp. 5-86; Petrus Berchorius, *Reductorium morale, Liber XV: Ovidius moralizatus, cap. I, De formis figurisque deorum. Textus e codice Brux., Bibl. Reg. 863-9 critice editus*, Utrecht: Rijksuniversiteit, Instituut voor Laat Latijn, 1966, pp. 40-41.

[35] The *Libellus* was published with annotations by Thomas Muncker, *Mythographi latini*, Amsterdam 1681, Vol. II, pp. 301-330; Augustinus van Staveren, *Auctores mythographi latini*, Leyden and Amsterdam 1742, pp. 896-938. The most complete modern edition is

a very close comparison for the type of sources available to Buondelmonti to enrich his descriptions, and it is in this direction rather than towards ancient prototypes that we should look when searching for the iconographical sources of images that enrich part of his visual tradition.

In conclusion, Buondelmonti's sensibility for the visual culture of antiquity, his interest in ancient art and, even more, his pursuit of making surveys, his efforts at restoring and contextualizing ancient monuments, his attention to technical details, as well as his accuracy in describing ancient structures, all contribute to making Cristoforo Buondelmonti not simply "un umanista antiquario", as in the fortunate definition by Robert Weiss, but even "un umanista archeologo", whose pioneering exploration of the Greek islands deserves a first-rank place in the history of Classical archaeology.

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H. Liebeschütz, *Fulgentius Metaphoralis. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Mythologie im Mittelalter*, Leipzig and Berlin 1926, esp. pp. 117-128, with text and the complete set of facsimiles from an early manuscript, Vatican Library cod. Reginensis 1290. For mentions and discussions of the role played by this text in the early Humanist period, see Ernest H. Wilkins, "Descriptions of Pagan Divinities from Petrarch to Chaucer", *Speculum* 32 (1952), pp. 511-522, esp. pp. 519-520; Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, esp. pp. 75, 79, 80, 81, 150, 179, 194; Jean Seznec, *Survival of Pagan Gods*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 172-179; Karl Lehmann and P. Williams Lehmann, *Samothracian Reflections: Aspects of the Revival of the Antique*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973; Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, esp. pp. 20-21. According to A. Campana, whose opinion is reported in Lehmann and Lehmann, *Samothracian Reflections*, p. 95, note 65, this text is a palimpsest manuscript of an original text dating to 1400 and must therefore be dated to shortly after the beginning of the fifteenth century and not exactly at the turn of the century as maintained by previous scholars. As for the geographic origin of this manuscript, certain names present in the original document and referring to the north-east region of Italy have been considered elements in favour of its origin from the area of Padua.