ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 9 (2012)

Seas, Islands, Humanists

The Politics of the Isolario: Maritime Cosmography and Overseas Expansion During the Renaissance

George Tolias

doi: 10.12681/hr.287

To cite this article:

Tolias, G. (2013). The Politics of the Isolario: Maritime Cosmography and Overseas Expansion During the Renaissance. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, *9*, 27–52. https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.287

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 12/10/2024 09:33:15

THE POLITICS OF THE ISOLARIO:
MARITIME COSMOGRAPHY AND OVERSEAS EXPANSION DURING THE RENAISSANCE

George Tolias

Abstract: Assessed as a series of narrative geographical constructs, isolarii reflect the diverse political and strategic agenda of the societies that produced and made use of them. Considering the geographical range covered by each isolario, their successive structure and contents, the article attempts to evaluate them as eclectic maritime cosmographies that sustained and supported the various workings of Western European overseas expansion from the early fifteenth century to the early seventeenth.

The isolario is a cartographic encyclopaedia of islands, a particular genre that flourished during the Renaissance exploration of the maritime horizons. The isolario is a maritime cosmography, an erudite effort to chart the seas through the detailed cartographic presentation of sole fixed positions in the maritime flux: the islands. As a cultural construct, the isolario reflects the challenges of early modern cosmography, due to European expansion towards the east and west and the resulting altered perception of the world.[1] It processes and promotes an alternative spatial system, varied and fragmentary, situated after the familiar continental frontiers. The isolario could be considered as a Humanistic project, an early modern echo of the ancient insular peregrinations narrated by Homer, Virgil and Apollodorus. It constitutes yet another combination of learned approach and empirical inspection. In fact, the isolario reflects a meeting among the various forces of rising modernity: the notions of connectivity imposed by merchants and navigators on the scattered image of the world; the political and economic prospects of maritime expansion; the development of long-distance communication networks; Humanism's curiosity about geography, natural history and ethnography; the growing faith of the learned in tested and positive information; and the urge to provide administrators and men of action with useful, practical tools.

The isolario is an artefact of early modern geographical culture, a Renaissance project that did not survive into the Age of Enlightenment, nor was it transmuted into another descriptive and cartographic geographical

[1] See Frank Lestringant, "Le monde ouvert", in Gérald Chaix (ed.), *L'Europe de la Renaissance, 1470-1560*, Nantes: Éditions du Temps, 2002, pp. 9-26 (especially pp. 18-19).

medium. Thus, the isolario has to be considered as a transitional genre, and its history could serve as an illustration of the equivocations of notions and perceptions of maritime space during a time of radical change in the conception of the world. The gradual widening of geographical horizons and the resulting Mediterranean and oceanic European expansion affected and shaped the isolario's fortune. One could say, indeed, that the diverse strategies of maritime expansion form the isolario's hidden political agenda. On a previous occasion the place and the function of the isolario in the making of early modern geographical culture was evaluated.[2] Here, an attempt will be made to investigate the major geopolitical challenges lying at the foundations of these works and to assess their symbolic and practical functions within this framework.

The Isolario and Early Levantine Colonialism

The notion of insularity was already connected to the idea of expansion in late medieval geographic literature. In Hughes de Saint Victor's *Descriptio mappe mundi* (twelfth century), the islands of the Adriatic Sea are presented as pieces of scattered land in the maritime flux, conquered by man, while in Ricobaldus de Ferrara's *De locis orbis et insularum et marium* (thirteenth century) the description of the islands was related to notions of commercial growth.[3] At the threshold of the fifteenth century, a merchant and a Dominican friar, the brothers Leonardo and Goro Dati, celebrated the merchant mariners' new world in their cosmographical poem, *La Sphera*, and illustrated in its maps the coasts and islands of the trade routes.[4]

With the emergence of the isolario during the first decades of the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Turks were challenging the Venetians, Genoese and Franks, threatening their early colonial and insular annex of Western feudalism in the Greek East. The strategic penetration of the Ottoman Turks into the Levant is one of the isolario's primary *raisons d'êtres*. The creator of the genre, Cristoforo Buondelmonti, offered a good example of the isolario's hidden geopolitical agenda when he proposed an ideological recuperation of

---

[2] George Tolias, "*Isolarii,* Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century", in David Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography*, Vol. 3: *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 263-284.

[3] See Nathalie Bouloux, "Les îles dans les descriptions géographiques et les cartes du Moyen Âge", *Médiévales* 47 (2004), pp. 47-62.

[4] For the significance of the work in the creation of maritime expansion, see Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 61-68.

the Greek Levant through the geographic and antiquarian quest for the Latin past of the islands in the Greek East.[5]

Cristoforo Buondelmonti, the Florentine priest and man of letters who lived most of his life in the Greek East, initiated the isolario tradition.[6] Between 1415 and 1418, he composed the *Descriptio insule Crete*, an antiquarian geographical itinerary of Crete, dedicated to the Humanist Niccolò Niccoli, whose library Buondelmonti supplied with Greek manuscripts. Around 1420 he composed the *Liber insularum Archipelagi*, dedicated to Cardinal Giordano Orsini. The book contains descriptions and maps of some 79 islands and important coastal locations in the Ionian and Aegean Seas. Constantinople stands as the political centre of this insular universe: a map and a long description are dedicated to it, together with the Genoese settlement in Pera, on the opposite side of the Golden Horn, described in the text as "the most beautiful city of the Genoese" (see fig. 1).

As an intellectual creation, Buondelmonti's isolario played a significant role in the reappropriation of the Levantine islands for Latin Christianity. We see this, for instance, in the case of the island of Syros, where the Frankish past is the only part of the island's history that Buondelmonti retained. The same approach is observed for the other islands too. In Crete he sought the descendants of the Roman families who settled there in the Augustan age, in Athens he described the Acciajuoli court, in Zakynthos he mentioned the tomb of his relative, Magdalene Buondelmonti, wife of Leonardo Tocco, and Countess Palatine of Cephalonia and Zakynthos.[7] All this information aims

---

[5] See George Tolias, "Γύρω από έναν στίχο του Βιργίλιου. Η Σύρος στα νησολόγια, 15ος-17ος αιώνας" [After a verse by Virgil: Syros in the isolarii, fifteenth-seventeenth centuries], in *id.*, *Χάρτες και ιστορίες. Ελληνικές τοπογραφίες της Αναγέννησης και των Φώτων* [Maps and histories: topographies of Greece during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment], Thessaloniki: Ziti Publications, 2008, pp. 15-40.

[6] Christophori Bondelmontii Florentini, *Librum insularum Archipelagi*, ed. G. R. Ludovicus de Sinner, Leipzig and Berlin: G. Reimer, 1824; Émile Legrand (ed.), *Description des îles de l'Archipel par Christophe Buondelmonti, version grecque par un anonyme*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897; Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *Descriptio insule Crete et Liber insularum, cap. XI: Creta*, ed. Marie-Anne van Spitael, Heraklion: Association for the Cultural Development of Heraklion, 1981; G. Ragone, "Il Liber insularum Archipelagi di Cristoforo dei Buondelmonti. Filologia del testo, filologia dell'immagine", in D. Marcotte (ed.), *Humanisme et culture géographique à l'époque du Concile de Constance. Autour de Guillaume Fillastre*, Actes du Colloque de l'Université de Reims, Reims, 18-19 November 1999, Turnhout: Brepols, 2002, pp. 177-217.

[7] Magdalene Buondelmonti, daughter of Manente Buondelmonti and Lapa Acciajuoli, was wife of Leonardo I Tocco. In 1381, after her husband's death, she assumed the role of

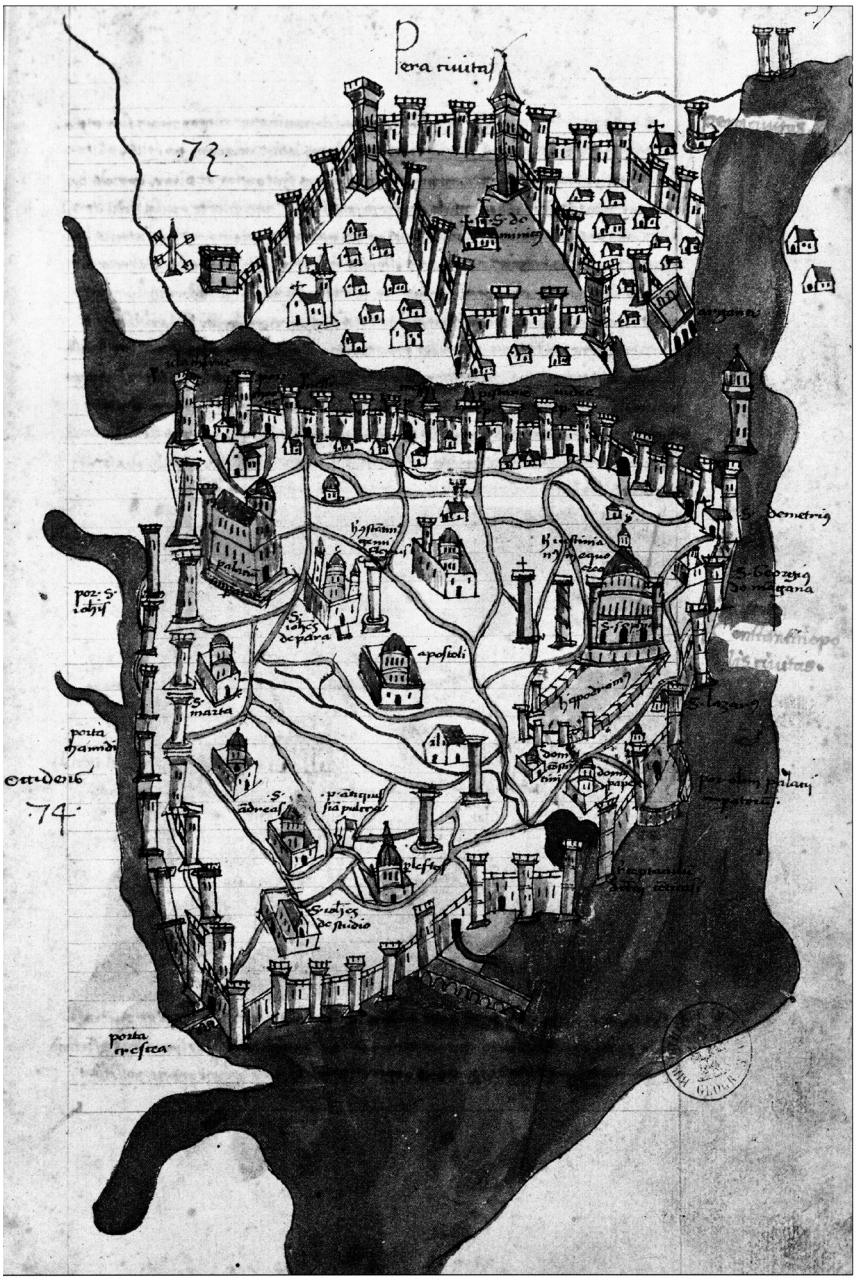


Fig. 1. Cristoforo Buondelmonti, the cities of Constantinople and Pera, *Liber insularum Archipelagi*, *c.* 1420. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cartes et Plans, Rés. Ge FF 9351, f. 37 (late fifteenth-century copy).

to reinforce the islands' Frankish past. Buondelmonti's text also contains interesting remarks on Ottoman expansion, judgements on the decadence of the Greeks and thoughts on the fate of the Latin presence in the Levant.

The Latin presence on the islands is continually extolled in Buondelmonti's texts. This implicit viewpoint is plain in Buondelmonti's descriptions, as well as in his system of references. His sources included Pliny and Ovid, the digests by Florus and Lactantius, and other minor authors of ancient or medieval literature. However, his main source, his principal travelling companion – if not his guide – was Virgil, whose lines alluding to the regions he quoted whenever he could. Virgil is without doubt the most frequently quoted author in Buondelmonti's *Liber*;[8] the Florentine cartographer and traveller perhaps consulted a florilegium of Virgil's works, if he did not indeed know them by heart.[9] This overwhelming presence turns the isolario into a sort of geographical commentary on Aeneas' wanderings, a geographical reading of the Archipelago as part of the Roman imperial construct, legitimising the Latin colonial presence in it. The intrinsic process of cultural and historical reclamation of the Greek East was recognised by the sixteenth-century anonymous Greek translator of Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum*: unable to distinguish Buondelmonti's reference to Dante ("finis animo esset meorum iam laborum et aliarum hinc inde scalarum ascendere"),[10] he understood his wanderings as "peregrinations in the diverse commercial colonies".[11]

The first printed isolario, Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti's "Island Navigation" ("Periplous Nison"), was published in Venice, by Guilelmus Anima Mia, Tridinensis, *c.* 1485/6.[12] The work contains 49 woodcut island charts and is

---

governor of the county, until her son Carolo I Tocco came of age, in 1388. She died after 1401. For Buondelmonti's description of the villa and the collections of Niccolò Corner on Crete, see Benedetta Bessi, "Cristoforo Buondelmonti: Greek Antiquities in Florentine Humanism", here below, p. 66.

[8] See indicatively for the case of Crete, Buondelmonti, *Descriptio insule Crete et Liber insularum*, pp. 61-62.

[9] The latter hypothesis is more probable given the frequent mistakes in Buondelmonti's quotations.

[10] In his dedication to Cardinal Orsini, Buondelmonti mentioned the end of his wanderings abroad through a paraphrasing of Dante's verse: "Tu proverai sì come sa di sale / lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle / lo scender e 'l salir per l'altrui scale" (*Divina Commedia*, *Paradiso*, XVII, 58-60).

[11] "τό πέρας τῶν ἐμῶν πόνων καί τῶν ἔνθεν κακεῖθεν ἐν διαφόροις ἐμπορίοις περιοδευμάτων". See Legrand, *Description des îles de l'Archipel*, p. 1.

[12] See the introduction by Frederick R. Goff in Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti: *Isolario, Venice 1485*, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1972. The work bears no title. The first sonnet starts with the Greek words "Περίπλους Νήσων", transliterated with Latin characters.

dedicated to Doge Giovanni Mocenigo. Bartolomeo's texts are a précis of Buondelmonti's descriptions, and the isolario was thus intended to serve the same purposes. It was confined to the Greek islands of the Archipelago, with the addition of Cyprus, controlled by Venice since the rule of Caterina Cornaro in 1474. The descriptions are written in Italian sonnets, and the scanty information they offer is once more limited to antiquarian issues or to the Latin past of the islands. The main difference of the new work is related to the maps. Bartolomeo was a Venetian ship captain,[13] and his maps are of a sharply nautical character, following the technique of the portolan charts. A compass surrounds them all, and 11 of them also contain a scale.

The isolario was hence a matter not only for antiquarian scholars but also for navigators. Furthermore, the genre was brought to Venice, where it was in a certain way adopted. An island-city itself, metropolis of a vast island and colonial empire in the Eastern Mediterranean, major cartographic centre of the sixteenth century, Venice was indeed the most appropriate place for the isolario to flourish. Historians of cartography, observing that the majority of the sixteenth-century isolarii were printed in Venice, perceive the isolario as a local Venetian cartographic speciality. Nevertheless, the major developments in the history of the genre occurred elsewhere. Only in the final stage of its history, after the Battle of Lepanto (1571), did the isolario become a strictly Venetian affair. It would be more accurate to state that from that moment on, the isolario shared the fate of Venice: it followed the decline of the Serenissima and vanished with her.

Mediterranean and Oceanic Expansion

The transformation of the isolario took place within the framework of Florentine Humanistic geography. In the manuscript tradition of Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum*, we come across copies from the fifteenth century with the addition of the big islands of the Western Mediterranean, such as Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica.[14] The insular atlas of the Greek archipelago was gradually becoming an atlas of the Mediterranean islands. The process of enhancement of Buondelmonti's isolario led to the *Insularium illustratum*

---

[13] Massimo Donattini, "Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti, il suo Isolario e un viaggio di Giovanni Bembo, 1525-1530", *Geografia Antiqua* 3-4 (1994-1995), p. 230.

[14] Such as the undated copy of Buondelmonti's *Liber* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Rés. Ge FF 9351), which includes supplementary maps of Crete, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. See Monique-Cécile Garand, "La tradition manuscrite du *Liber Archipelagi insularum* à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris", *Scriptorium* 29 (1975), pp. 69-76.

compiled by Henricus Martellus Germanus between 1480 and 1490.[15] Henricus Martellus was a German mapmaker working in Florence. He is also known for his lavish copies of Ptolemy's *Geography*, supplemented with modern maps.[16] In addition to Buondelmonti's set of maps, the *Insularium illustratum* includes maps of the larger islands of the Mediterranean Sea, and maps of England, Ireland, Ceylon and Japan. It also contains maps of the four Mediterranean peninsulas (Iberia, Italy, the Balkans and Asia Minor), the Scandinavian peninsula, maps of Palestine, France and Germany, three nautical charts (European Atlantic coasts, Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas) and a world map.[17] The material is similar to the new maps added in his copies of Ptolemy's *Geography* and it was selected from all the available sources then considered accurate. In these maps we can recognise the work of fifteenth-century cartographers, such as Rosselli, Claudius Clavus, Cardinal Fillastre and Nicolaus Cusanus, as well as fourteenth-century cartographers, such as Marino Sanudo.[18]

Henricus Martellus completed and in a way updated Buondelmonti's Levantine isolario by the addition of a map of Cyprus accompanied by a description based on Pius II. The island had recently come under Venetian rule (1474) and was therefore connected to the rest of Venice's possessions in the Greek seas. Buondelmonti's original corpus was also "updated", since Henricus Martellus added plans of the cities of Genoese Chios and the Rhodes of the Knights of St John, together with new descriptions, again based on Pius II. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 made these cities the last strongholds of Christendom in the Levant (see figs 2-3).

The *Insularium illustratum* is a cartographic compendium of the changing image of the world. In this prospect the world map is an important testimony. It proposes a corrected version of the Ptolemaic world map, according to

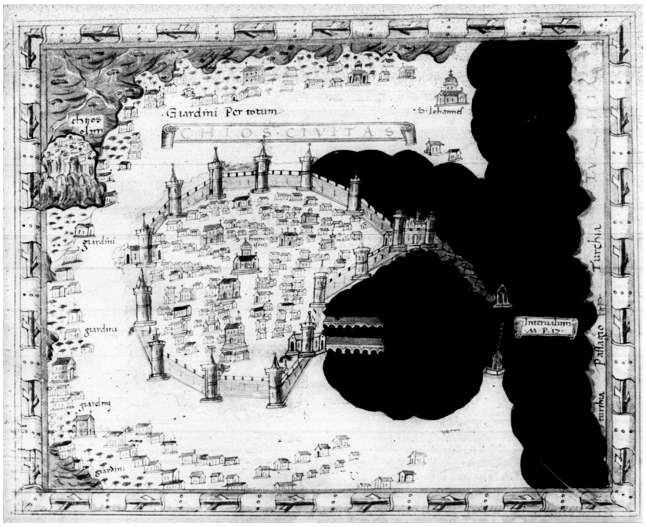
---

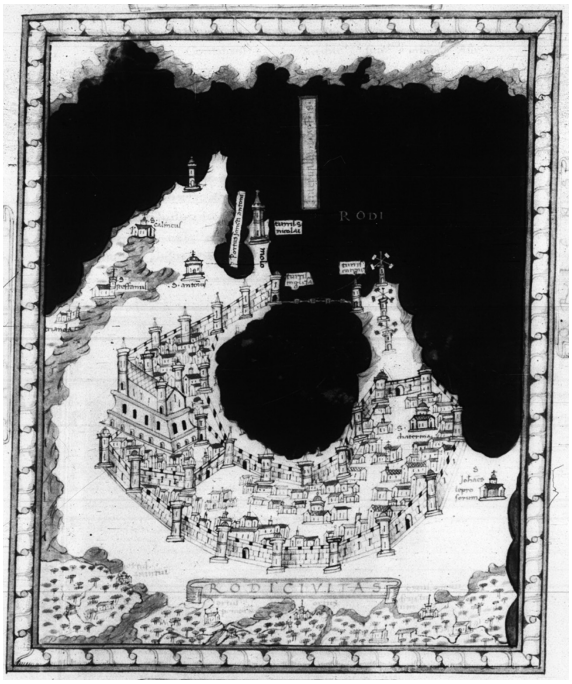
[15] On Henricus Martellus and his isolario, see here below the article by Nathalie Bouloux, pp. 77-94.

[16] Roberto Almagià, "I mappamondi di Enrico Martello e alcuni concetti geografici di Cristforo Colombo", *La Bibliofilia* 42 (1940), pp. 288-311. See also Patrick Gautier Dalché, "The Reception of Ptolemy's *Geography* (end of the Fourteenth to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century)", in Woodward (ed.), *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, pp. 285-364.

[17] The surviving copies of Henricus Martellus' isolario do not contain the same set of maps. The maps mentioned here represent the totality of the maps included in the four copies of the work, according to Almagià's catalogue, "I mappamondi di Enrico Martello", p. 299.

[18] *Ibid.* and Bouloux, herein.





Figs 2-3. Henricus Martellus, the cities of Chios and Rhodes,
Insularium illustratum, *c.* 1490. London, British Library, MS Add. 15760, ff. 8v and 13r.

the new geographical information. The updated shape of Africa is due to the Portuguese explorations of the African coasts, the outline and the content of Asia to the travels of Marco Polo and Niccolò dei Conti. We can also discern the new Portuguese discoveries in the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the impact of the geographical information on Asia and Africa communicated at the Council of Ferrara-Florence.[19] An essential amendment to the Ptolemaic prototype is the omission of the antipodes, which up to then were framing the southern part of the world and transforming the Indian Ocean into an enclosed lake-like sea. Cross-cultural exchanges and terrestrial and maritime explorations had altered the image of the globe; the world was thereafter open.

The *Insularium illustratum* displays the major changes that occurred in early modern cosmography. Situated at the threshold of the great discoveries, the isolario was inspired by the ambition to recapitulate the new geographical data, to update and complete Ptolemy's *Geography*. The Levantine isolario was gradually transformed into an insular atlas of the Mediterranean and then into a universal island atlas. This was due to the combined action of a variety of factors: on the one hand, the Ottoman expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean and on the North African coast was steering occidental ambitions towards oceanic navigation; on the other hand, the Portuguese explorations proved that there was an alternative way to India via the circumnavigation of Africa.

The rise of the oceanic perspective transformed early modern cosmography. Denis Cosgrove has dedicated reflective pages to the shift in Humanist cosmography in the late fifteenth century and the ideas of Europe's oceanic commercial expansion and proselytising missions.[20] He traced "the rhetorical construction of a European imperial discourse with specific attention to the idea of an oceanic globe", where islands and harbours form "a necklace of trading enclaves along the continental coastlines".[21] The Humanists subscribed to this oceanic cosmographic vision and promoted it, since it was compatible with the ancient and authoritative concept of a tripartite–tricontinental ecumene surrounded by the ocean and its scattered islands.

---

[19] See Sebastiano Gentile (ed.), *Firenze e la scoperta dell'America. Umanesimo e geografia nel '400 Fiorentino*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1992, pp. 237-240; Patrick Gautier Dalché, *La Géographie de Ptolémée en Occident (IVe-XVIe siècle)*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2009, pp. 183-188.

[20] Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, pp. 79-101 (Chapter Four: "Oceanic Globe").

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The oceanic or universal isolario inaugurated by Henricus Martellus was destined to have a conspicuous career throughout the sixteenth century. Already in the next decade (about 1500), an anonymous Florentine isolario maker attempted to compose a universal isolario, which remained unfinished, since it contains only maps and no descriptions.[22] The compilation is strictly limited to islands: it completes the core of Buondelmonti's set of 79 Greek islands with 52 new ones, attaining a total of 131 islands. It augments Henricus Martellus' compilation with extra-Mediterranean islands. Among the additions there is a map of the frozen polar zone, whose icy fragments are presented as islands.

The isolario depicts a world in movement; it proposes a provisional report of the ongoing exploration.[23] The awareness that the discoveries were constantly adding new islands to the world's map was clearly stated in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which sealed the oceanic antagonism between the Spanish and the Portuguese: an imaginary meridian situated at some 400 leagues west of the Capo Verde was to define the exploration ambitions and the colonisation rights of the two rivals on the oceans.[24] Within this context, the isolario quit the Mediterranean for a while and shifted towards the west. The discarding of the Mediterranean and the primacy of oceanic expansion are exemplified in a Portuguese isolario by Valentim Fernandes.

Fernandes was a Moravian scholar and printer attracted to Lisbon by the Portuguese discoveries and the trading perspectives of maritime expansion at the end of the fifteenth century. He was appointed by the king of Portugal as commercial agent for the spice trade with Germany, representing in Portugal the Welser merchant house. As an agent he was involved in the diffusion of overseas information: the arrival in Germany of the sketch of the first rhinoceros sent to Europe, an image then engraved by Dürer in 1515, was due to him.[25] As a printer, Fernandes published 24 books, mainly on religious subjects. Nevertheless, his interest in exploration led him to publish, in 1502, Marco Polo's and Niccolò dei Conti's travels. The book contains an introduction written by him, in which Lisbon is presented as the future capital of international overseas trade.[26]

---

[22] London, British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Add. 23925. See F. W. Husluck, "Notes on Manuscripts in the British Museum Relating to Levant Geography and Travel", *Annual of the British School at Athens* XII (1905-1906), pp. 196-215 (p. 200).

[23] See Lestringant, "Le monde ouvert", p. 10.

[24] Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye*, p. 84.

[25] See Gerhard Seibert, "500 Years of the Manuscript of Valentim Fernandes, a Moravian Book Printer in Lisbon", in B. E. Cieszyńska (ed.), *Iberian and Slavonic Cultures: Contact and Comparison*, Lisbon: CompaRes, 2007, pp. 79-88 (p. 80).

[26] *M. Paulo. Ho liuro de Nycolao veneto...,* Lisbon: Valentym Fernandez Alemao, 1502.

The isolario was sent to Konrad Peutinger, the Augsburg antiquarian, Humanist and book collector, vividly interested in cartography and exploration.[27] The contact between Peutinger and Fernandes was established through their mutual relation to the Welser trading family: Fernandes was the Welser's agent in Lisbon, while Peutinger was married to Margareta Welser. The title of the isolario is *As ihlas do mar oceano* and was compiled in 1507. It was part of the material sent by Fernandes to Peutinger between 1506 and 1510, a dossier of *roteiros* and descriptions of Portuguese discoveries and overseas expansion, to which Peutinger gave the title *De insulis et peregrinationem Lusitanorum*.[28] The isolario contains 31 maps and descriptions of islands. The islands are assembled in two sections, the first covering the islands of the Atlantic Ocean, the second those of the Capo Verde. The maps have a nautical aspect, drawn after Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti's manner.[29]

A cartographic exaltation of the Portuguese colonial empire,[30] Valentim Fernandes' isolario did not inspire any other work dedicated strictly to the oceanic islands. At the beginning of the sixteenth century numerous works were published describing the newly discovered islands, and their titles are similar to those in the isolario tradition.[31] Nevertheless, they do not belong to the canon, since they are not island cartographic encyclopaedias. Mention should also be made here of two other works of limited and "national" geographic scope, which appeared later in the sixteenth century. The first one is the *Isole appartenenti all' Italia* by Leandro Alberti, published posthumously as an annex to his description of Italy in 1561, by

---

[27] See Jochen Brüning *et al.*, *Die Bibliothek Konrad Peutingers. Edition der historischen Kataloge und Rekonstruktion der Bestände*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003.

[28] The isolario is kept in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (Codex monacensis hispanicus 27). It was published in 1997 by the Academia Portuguesa de Historia.

[29] First section: Sam Miguel, Terceyra, Santa Maria, Sam Jorge, do Pyco, do Fayal, a Graciosa, das Flores / e Corvo, Madeyra, Lançarote, Forte Ventura, Grâ Canária, Tanariffe, a Gomeyra, da Palma, ho Ferro, Sam Nicolau. The second section includes: Bona Vista Insula, Salis Insula, May Insula, Sancti Iacobi Insula, Fogo Insula, Braua Insula, Sancti Nicolai Insula, Vasa Insula, Mala Sombra Insula, Sancta Lucie Insula, Sancti Vicente Insula, Sancti Antonij Insula, Sancti Tome Insula, Principis Insula and Anno Bono.

[30] Neil Safier and Ilda Mendes dos Santos, "Mapping Maritime Triumph and the Enchantment of Empire: Portuguese Literature of the Renaissance", in Woodward (ed.), *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, p. 462.

[31] Such as Christopher Columbus' *Epistola de insulis Indiae nuper inventis* (1493), Massimiliano Transilvano's *De Moluccis insulis epistula* (1523) and Pigafetta's account of Magellan's voyage (1521). The same can be stated for Pietro Coppo's atlas *De toto orbe* (Venice 1520). On Transilvano's and Pigafetta's "isolarii", see Emmanuelle Vagnon, "De la Grèce antique au voyage de Magellan. Les modèles humanistes d'Antonio Pigafetta et de Maximilianus Transylvanus", *Médiévales* 58 (2010), pp. 99-111.

Vincenzo da Bologna, without maps. These were added in the subsequent editions (5 in 1568, 7 in 1581).[32] The second work is an extra-Mediterranean isolario, the *Brevis et chorographica insularum aliquot Maris Baltici* by another antiquarian scholar, Denis Chytraeus (Rostock 1591).[33] These works are situated at the periphery of the isolario canon. They are both annexes to broader antiquarian descriptions of their authors' countries, and their political agenda are of a patriotic scope.

The isolario's influence is also evident in the sixteenth-century chart-making tradition, the occidental as well as the Ottoman. The major Ottoman charting enterprise during the sixteenth century is Piri Reis' *Kitab ı bahriye* [Book of navigation], composed during the 1520s and dedicated to Suleiman the Magnificent.[34] It is an analytical presentation of the Mediterranean, arranged in a series of short, independent chapters with maps, after the isolario manner. The isolario flavour of the work is reinforced by the fact that the majority of the maps represent islands with their adjacent shores. Furthermore, Piri Reis' presentation mode is in a way telescopic. He often dedicated more than one map to each subject, changing the scale. The cartographic result is interesting, since the maps also represent the detail of each island and its position in the broader area. The *Kitab* contains 130 chapters in its short version, and 220 in its extensive one, describing and charting islands, peninsulas, coastal cities, coasts and river deltas. It is an innovative and coherent charting of the Mediterranean Sea, a prelude to the seventeenth-century Dutch nautical manuals: a portolan chart parcelled out and presented in the form of a book containing a series of coastal and island maps. The practical aspect of the work is reinforced by its introduction on the art of navigation and its annex with the portolan text.

It is at first glance surprising that this novel approach came from a rather peripheral and relatively poor cartographic culture, such as the Ottoman

---

[32] Leandro Alberti, *Isole appartenenti all' Italia, descritte da F. Leandro Alberti Bolognese…*, Venice: Giov. Battista Porta, 1581. See G. Roletto, "Le cognizioni geografiche di Leandro Alberti", *Bollettino della Reale Società geografica italiana* (1922), pp. 255-283.

[33] The work is mentioned by Minna Skafte Jensen (ed.), *A History of Nordic Neo-Latin Literature*, Odense 1995. During more than 20 years of my isolario research, I have never seen a copy of the work, nor read an analytical presentation of its contents. It is possible that the work does not contain any maps.

[34] See P. Kahle, *Piri Reis und seine Bahriye*, Leipzig and Vienna 1929; D. Loupis, "Ottoman Nautical Charting and Miniature Painting: Technology and Aesthetics", in Irvin Cemil Schick (ed.), *M. Uğur Derman, 65th Birthday Festschrift*, Ankara 2000, pp. 369-397; *id.*, *Ο Πιρι Ρεις χαρτογραφεί το Αιγαίο. Η Οθωμανική χαρτογραφία και η Λίμνη του Αιγαίου* [Piri Reis maps the Aegean: Ottoman cartography and the Aegean lake], Athens: Trochalia, 1999.

one. Nevertheless, there were some good reasons for the innovation to take place. The Ottomans' supremacy on land and their continental perception of space led them to consider the closed seas of the Mediterranean as lakes. Furthermore, the *Kitab* appeared at a moment when the Mediterranean was becoming indeed an Ottoman lake: after Suleiman's naval expeditions in the Levant and along the North African coast, the Ottomans were direct or indirect masters of three quarters of the Mediterranean shores. Piri Reis celebrated the glory of Ottoman nautical art and power, together with the Ottomans' expansionist ambition in their Mediterranean "new world".

The *Kitab* did not have any influence on the isolario's further development. The fact that it was written in a non-European language, occidental cultural arrogance, or even plain chance had as a result that the Western mapmakers did not profit from the novelty proposed by Piri Reis. The isolario did not develop in the direction of the systematic sea atlas and continued its fragmentary and piecemeal approach, that is, it considered that charting the islands was a way to chart the sea, retaining just the sea's punctuation, to use Frank Lestringant's metaphor for the islands.[35]

The Mediterranean islands were always included in the contents of the isolario. In fact, the Levantine origins of the genre sealed its character. The descriptive model of the Levantine islands elaborated by Buondelmonti prevailed in sixteenth-century isolario production, where it was projected into a Mediterranean or an oceanic-global scale: the seas are portrayed as an array of archipelago systems with their narrow horizons, with their centres and their peripheries, their communication networks and their arrangement as interconnected seafaring and trading posts. Thus, the first universal printed isolario to appear, by Benedetto Bordone, was therefore centred on the familiar core of the Mediterranean islands.

The *Libro di Benedetto Bordone nel qual si ragiona de tutte l'isole del mondo* was printed in Venice, by Nicolo Zoppino, in 1528. It was a commercial edition, rather successful, if we judge from its later editions by various Venetian printers, in 1534, 1537 and 1547. Benedetto Bordone was an astrologer and manuscript illustrator from Padua, who converted to cartography in 1508, when he applied to the Senate for permission to print a map of Italy and a world map, both now lost.[36] The isolario includes three inaugural maps

---

[35] Frank Lestringant, *L'atelier du cosmographe ou l'image du monde à la Renaissance*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1991, p. 153.

[36] On Bordone, see Roberto Almagià, "Intorno alle carte e figurazioni annesse all' isolario di Benedetto Bordone", *Masso Finiguera* 2 (1937), pp. 170-186; R. A. Skelton, "Bibliographical Note", *Libro di Benedetto Bordone...*, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis

(Europe and the Mediterranean, the Levant, and an oval world map based on the prototype by Francesco Rosselli),[37] followed by 107 small woodcut maps, arranged in 3 books. The first book includes 23 maps of islands and peninsulas in the Atlantic Ocean, starting from the European coast, then to America and returning to the Canary Islands, the Azores and Cadiz. The second book contains 78 Mediterranean maps, most of them in the Greek Archipelago, the heart of the Venetian maritime empire. The third book contains 8 maps of islands in the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. Three of these maps are double, ancient and modern, as Bordone published the Ptolemaic map next to the modern one (Sicily, the British Isles and the Canaries).

The *Libro* was a commercial enterprise of vulgarisation, whose aim was more mercantile than scientific. Massimo Donattini revealed, in his elegant analysis, the traditional, even medieval foundation of Bordone's descriptions: the persistence of Pliny and Isidore, and the resonance of deeply rooted legends on island marvels and fantasies.[38] Be that as it may, we owe to Bordone – apart from his illegitimate son, Julius Caesar Scaliger – the invention of the title "isolario",[39] the creation of a vogue for this kind of work, and the diffusion to the wider public of a maritime and oceanic image of the earth. Furthermore, we owe to Bordone the reaffirmation of the Levantine island model as a way to chart the ocean. The Levant, with its system of neighbouring islands and its two metropolitan poles (Venice and Constantinople), constitutes the core, literally and graphically, of Bordone's isolario. We could go further and suggest that Bordone projected the image of the Venetian Levantine and insular empire onto the Spanish possessions in America, where the "Great City of Temixtitan" (Mexico) was represented as an island-city of lagoons, an extrapolated Venice escorted by the newly discovered archipelagos (see figs 4-5).[40]

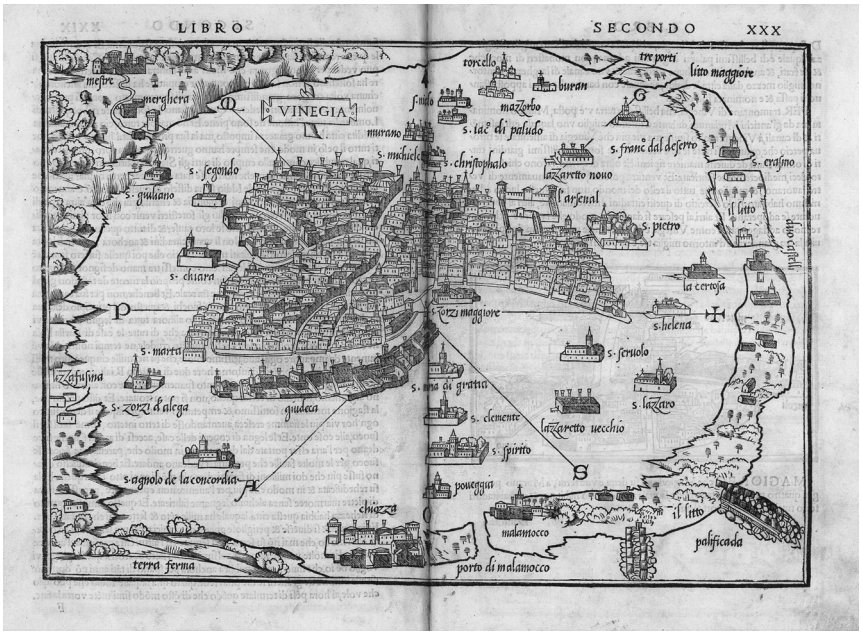
Terratum, 1966, pp. V-XII; Lilian Armstrong, "Benedetto Bordon, *Miniator* and Cartographer in Early Sixteenth-century Venice", *Imago Mundi* 48 (1996), pp. 65-92.

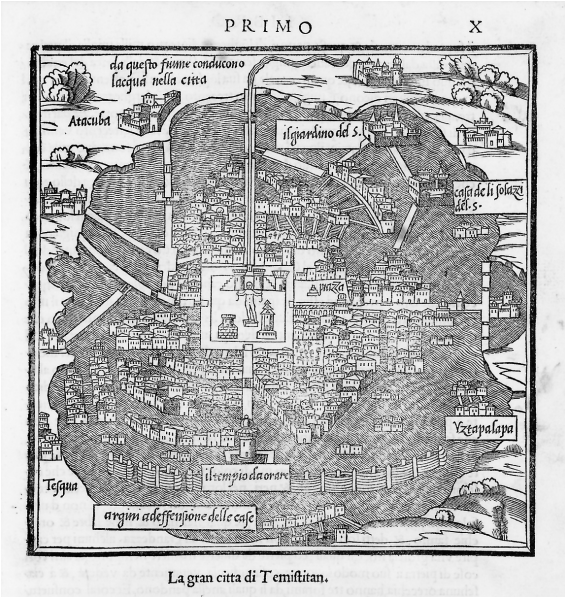
[37] Sebastiano Crinò, "I planisferi de Francesco Rosselli dell'epoca delle grandi scoperte geografiche", *La Bibliofilia* 41 (1939), pp. 381-405.

[38] Massimo Donattini, "Introduzione", *Benedetto Bordone. Isolario*, Modena: Aldine, 1983, pp. 16-17.

[39] It was the second (1534) edition of Bordone's book that proposed and imposed the term isolario.

[40] Denis Cosgrove, "Mapping New Worlds: Culture and Cartography in Sixteenth-century Venice", *Imago Mundi* 44 (1992), pp. 65-89.





La gran citta di Temistitan.

Figs 4-5. Benedetto Bordone, the great cities of Venice and Temixtitan (Mexico), *Libro...de tutte l'isole del mondo...*, Venice: Nicolo Zoppino, 1528. Athens, Margarita Samourkas Collection.

The Aquatic World

The maritime, oceanic image of the world was to be further elaborated by the next two universal isolarii, proposed by two major sixteenth-century cosmographers: the Spanish Alonso de Santa Cruz and the French André Thevet. Alonso de Santa Cruz was a key figure in the cartographic support of Spanish overseas expansion in the sixteenth century. He was cosmographer to the king of Spain and to the Casa de la Contratación, the state institution in charge of the updating of the Padrón Real, the officially approved chart pattern. The most important among his cartographic works are the world map finished in 1542 and the universal isolario, the *Islario general de todas las isles del mundo*, compiled *c*. 1545 and surviving in four copies.[41] The world map survives in a unique copy, now in the Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm. It is in the form of globe gores, and thus we can presume that it was intended to be mounted as a globe. The isolario and the world map have an obvious complementary character, as they are both inscribed in a common cosmographical project; the first proposes the overall and compound image of the known world, and the second its analytical description. The common cosmographic pattern is reinforced by the temporal proximity of their making, as well as by the isolario's inaugural chapter, in which Alonso described cosmography's methodology, its mathematical (astronomical) foundation and its telescopic *modus operandi* as Ptolemy defined it: cosmography, geography and topography. The isolario also includes an introductory cosmographical meditation, in which Alonso drew a parallel between the variability of human history and the variability of the earthly figure, presenting the islands as products of the struggle between the elements.[42]

For the compilation of these works Alonso could use his own collection of maps and his first-hand experience of the Spanish overseas colonies, since he accompanied Sebastian Cabot on his expedition of 1526-1530. As royal cosmographer he also had access to the rich archival material at the Spanish court and at the Casa de la Contratación. In addition he gave in his isolario a list of the 46 authors, ancient, medieval and modern, whom he consulted.[43]

---

[41] Mariano Cuesta Domingo, "Alonso de Santa Cruz, cartógrafo y fabricante de instrumentos náuticos de la Casa de Contratación", *Revista Complutense de Historia de América* 30 (2004), pp. 7-40.

[42] Alonso also wrote a book on the medical aspects of melancholy (*Diagnóstico y tratamiento de las afecciones de los melancólicos*), published posthumously in 1622.

[43] Alonso de Santa Cruz, *Islario general de todas las islas del mundo por alonso de Santa Cruz, cosmographo mayor de Carlos I de Espana*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Res. Ms. 38, f. 18v.

The structure of the isolario is relevant to the maritime and oceanic concept promoted by the cosmographer of Philip II of Spain. The work contains a first section of eight numbered large-scale charts, presenting the major explored seas of the age: the eastern and western coast of Central America, the coasts of South America, the coasts of north-west America, the Mediterranean and the coasts of Europe and Africa in the Atlantic Ocean, the southern coasts of Africa, the coasts of Africa and Asia in the Indian Ocean, the coasts of south-east Asia, and the Levantine coasts. This section is followed by 102 maps, mainly of islands, but also peninsulas and coastal areas, arranged as follows: 11 maps for northern and western Europe, 60 maps for the Mediterranean, 13 for Africa and Asia, and 18 for the Pacific Ocean and the Americas.

The isolario celebrates Spain's imperial supremacy over the seas of the Ancient and the New Worlds. In his dedication to Philip II, Alonso reinforced this with eloquent references to Alexander's expeditions and to Augustus' hegemony over the entire known world. The *Islario general* illustrates Spain's global position. Indeed, the isolario's contents are relevant to the maritime strategic interests of Spain. Almost half of the maps (50 of 102) are dedicated to the Eastern Mediterranean region, and more than 20 to the Spanish possessions in Europe and the Americas. In the mid-sixteenth century Spain was not only an oceanic empire through the power of its armada, the network of its overseas colonies and its possession of the Low Countries, but also a Mediterranean power, through the control of the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies (Sicily and Sardinia). Spain was thus a major antagonist of the Ottoman Turks during the slow decline of Venice in the Levant, and it was under a Spanish admiral, Don John of Austria, that Ottoman expansionism was halted in Lepanto, in 1571.

The isolario by André Thevet, cosmographer to the last kings of the House of Valois, is a colossal enterprise, intended to cover at least 263 islands in all parts of the world. It was among the last works of the French cosmographer that were to remain in manuscript form, due to the political instability of the country, the loss of his patrons and his financial ruin. *Le grand insulaire et pilotage* forms two large folios, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Thevet did manage, however, before he went bankrupt to have plates made of most of the maps at the printing house of Thomas de Leu in Flanders, probably about 1586.[44]

[44] These maps are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and in the Gennadius Library, Athens, and Frank Lestringant and I hope to be able to publish at least the Mediterranean part of the *Grand insulaire*, which corresponds to the second volume of Thevet's manuscript.

The project of a maritime and oceanic atlas of the world is insinuated in the very title: *Le grand insulaire et pilotage*. It is also stated in the preface of the book, where Thevet presented the universal isolario as a necessary complement to the rest of his cosmographic works, creating "an accomplished cosmographic corpus".[45] In the same text he stressed the importance of the knowledge of island cosmography to navigation, exploration and maritime expansion. The sources of this vast compilation are also indicative of the work's seafaring content and context: nautical itineraries, travels of maritime exploration and pilot journals.[46]

Le grand insulaire et pilotage highlights France's ambitions of overseas expansion in the Mediterranean and the New World. Frank Lestringant has aptly analysed on various occasions the political functions of Thevet's great isolario, with its description of four islands representing the minute French presence in South America, one of which is the island Henri II presented as the stronghold of the French colonial presence in Brazil,[47] not to mention the nearby "Thevet island";[48] or the frequent mentions of the civilising process of the French colonisation of Canada, chasing the pagan demons out of the wild forests.[49] The Eastern Mediterranean islands were also a ground for French strategic penetration and trade ambitions. Since the Capitulations between France and the Ottoman Porte made in 1535, under Suleiman the Magnificent and Francis I, the French commercial share was prospering in the Levant, where French vessels were competing with the Venetians and the Genoese.[50]

Thevet sensed the need for global representation of the maritime world and proposed a graphic portrayal of the oceans on a set of two polar-projection hemispheric maps at the very opening of the *Grand insulaire* (see fig. 6). The choice of the polar projection served his purpose better than the

---

[45] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, manuscrits occidentaux, fr. 1542, "tend à composer un corps de cosmographie accompli de toutes ses parties".

[46] Lestringant *L'atelier du cosmographe,* pp. 151-152. See also Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "Maps and Exploration in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries", in Woodward (ed.), *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, pp. 749-750.

[47] Frank Lestringant, "Fictions de l'espace brésilien à la Renaissance. L'exemple de Guanabara", in Christian Jacob and Frank Lestringant (eds), *Arts et légendes d'espaces. Figures du voyage et rhétoriques du monde*, Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1981, pp. 205-256 (pp. 218-223).

[48] *Id., Le livre des îles. Atlas et récits insulaires de la Genèse à Jules Verne*, Geneva: Droz, 2002, p. 162.

[49] *Id., L'atelier du cosmographe*, p. 171.

[50] See the classic essay by A. Bruneau, *Traditions et politique de la France au Levant,* Paris: F. Alcan, 1931.

Fig. 6. André Thevet, north polar projected hemispheric map,
Le grand insulaire et pilotage, *c.* 1586.
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrits français 15452, vol. I, f. 3v.

normal eurocentric projections that usually left the oceanic masses outside the map. Furthermore, all his island maps have coordinates, although it is quite difficult to reconstruct the geographical unity of the material. They are also inscribed in the rhumb line system used in practical navigation charting, mainly the portolan charts. Let us note here that Thevet did not adopt Mercator's cylindrical projection, a technical solution that coordinated graticule coordinates and rhumb line networks,[51] a supplementary proof of his devotion to the old practical seafaring traditions.

Sixteenth-century nautical isolarii influenced the production of portolan charts and atlases, the main cartographic media of the aquatic world. Indeed, the presence of island maps increased in the Venetian nautical atlases by Battista Agnese and Giorgio Sideri.[52] Soon enough the chart-making workshops began producing manuscript nautical isolarii. Agnese's workshop turned out manuscript copies of Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti's isolario, such as the one kept in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana,[53] while the chart-maker Antonio Millo compiled his own Mediterranean isolario.[54]

Antonio's manuscript nautical isolarii were produced between 1582 and 1591. These are small-sized atlases, which include 90 maps and descriptions of the islands of the Mediterranean, without any general map of the sea, nor

---

[51] Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye*, p. 100.

[52] For Agnese's atlases, see Henry R. Wagner, *The Manuscript Atlases of Battista Agnese*, Chicago 1931, and Konrad Kretschmer, "Die Atlanten des Battista Agnese", *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft fur Erdkunde zu Berlin* XXXI (1896), pp. 362-368. For Sideri's atlases, see George Tolias, *The Greek Portolan Charts: A Contribution to the Mediterranean Cartography of the Modern Era*, Athens: Olkos for the National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1999.

[53] Venice, Bibliotheca Nazionale Marciana, Ms. It. IX, 188 (6286).

[54] Antonio Millo, an obscure and talented Greek chart-maker, was born on Milos in the early sixteenth century, when the island was still part of the Duchy of the Archipelago and the navigation centre of the region. He must have settled in Venice after the Ottoman conquest of the island in 1566. The technique and ornamentation of Antonio's earliest extant portolan chart (1567, Chicago, The Newberry Library) leads us to assume that he practised the art of nautical cartography in Diogo Honem's workshop. Antonio must have worked with him frequently, since the impact of this Portuguese cartographer's technique on Antonio's overall work indicates a regular cooperation between them. We do not know if he ever had a workshop of his own or if he took over Diogo Honem's when the latter retired in 1576. Whatever the case, from 1580 onwards Antonio received significant commissions, since the greatest part of his signed charts and atlases dates between 1580 and 1586. On Antonio Millo, see Georgios Tolias, "Un ammiraglio greco al servizio di Venezia. Antonio Millo e il suo isolario", in Camillo Tonini and Piero Lucchi (eds), *Navigare e descrivere. Isolari e portolani del Museo Correr di Venezia*, *XV-XVIII secolo*, Venice: Marsilio, 2001, p. 62.

any part of it. They reveal the Venetian nautical competence of the age, they are written in a corrupted Venetian dialect and they quite frequently include navigation manuals and brief portolan texts where the coastal locations of the Mediterranean are described in detail, as are the distances between them. The charts in Antonio's isolarii rely mostly on those of the printed isolarii of the time. He corrected only the maps of the larger islands, following the portolan chart tradition, which he trusted as more accurate. The descriptions of the islands are original, as are the accompanying texts, the narrative portolans and the navigation manuals. In his dedications, Antonio stressed the fact that he was himself an expert navigator. In two of his isolarii he signed as "Armiraglio dal Zante" or again as Antonio from Milos, "Antonio da Milo, Armiraglio in Candia". In Venetian terminology the title of "armiraglio" defined the person responsible for bringing ships into port, a kind of official harbour pilot.

With Antonio's work the isolario renewed its Mediterranean origins, celebrating Venice's central and historical position in Mediterranean navigation. Nevertheless, these kinds of works were already a thing of the past, an antiquarian fossil concerning mainly collectors. According to Antonio, the first isolario was a commission from the Venetian Senator Giacomo Contarini (1536-1595). Antonio's manuscript isolarii were meant for a specific clientele, in search of such rarities as a specialised nautical island manuscript. This is indicated all the more by his dedications to Venetian noblemen: the isolario of 1582 (today in the Sylvia Ioannou Collection) is dedicated to the Marquis Sforza Palavicini, while the isolario in the British Library (1591) is dedicated to Admiral Giovanni Bembo.

Antonio Millo's nautical isolarii continued to circulate in manuscript copies, artistic works of Venetian seamen, for another two or three generations. Three copies of the work in this form have been preserved, two in the Querini Stampalia Foundation, made by Captain Girolamo Baseglio (works of 1645), and one in a private collection, by the anonymous seaman who signed as MG, a work of the late seventeenth century. Even in 1738, we find maps lifted straight out of Millo's isolario, in Salmon's *Lo stato presente di tutti i popoli del mondo*, published in Venice. Furthermore, Mediterranean seamen continued to produce manuscript nautical isolarii up to the end of the eighteenth century, intended less for practical use, addressed mainly to a clientele of collectors and patrons. The most ambitious among them is the four-volume manuscript isolario by Antonio Borg, pilot of the admiral of the Order of Malta.[55]

[55] London, British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Add. 13960.

Decay and Vogue of the Isolario

The decay of the genre can be followed in the history of the printed isolarii. We can already trace it in Tomasso Porcacchi's *L'isole piu famose del mondo*, an anthology of the islands of the world first published in 1572 and illustrated with maps engraved by Girolamo Porro. With Porcacchi's work the irreversible decline of the isolario was marked. As an anthology, *L'isole piu famose* ignores the structural unity of space: geography fragments, as curiosity and local history move to the fore. Maritime cosmography becomes a pretext, while the main goal of the book is to propose an enjoyable read on the sea's curiosities. Porcacchi's objective was quite a successful one, since the *Isole famose* was to become a real best-seller in its day.[56]

The utter deterioration of the island books came with the Venetian topical isolarii inspired by the Turko-Venetian War and the misfortunes of Venetian maritime expansion.[57] The loss of the Duchy of the Archipelago (1566) and of the Kingdom of Cyprus (1572) inspired a number of small-format composite isolarii that appeared in Venice between 1565 and 1575. They contain mainly island maps, as well as views of towns and fortresses on the Levantine shores (see fig. 7). These popular publications incorporated material that had been previously published as loose leaves, and they were not intended for practical use or general edification: instead, they provided topical information about the theatres of the Turko-Venetian War and the situation prevailing there. Furthermore, their material is arranged in random order and they contain no text, being addressed to a broader spectrum of non-specialised readers, even to users with limited education; readers from all walks of life who wanted easily accessible visual information about the confrontation between the Ottoman East and the Christian West.[58]

---

[56] Tommaso Porcacchi, *L'isole piu famose del mondo descritte da Thomaso Porcacchi da Castiglione Arretino e intagliate da Girolamo Porro Padovano*, Venice 1572. Further augmented editions (*Con l'aggiunta di molte isole...*): 1576, 1590, 1604, 1620, 1686 and 1713.

[57] David Woodward, *Maps as Prints in the Italian Renaissance: Makers, Distributors and Consumers*, London: The British Library, 1996.

[58] Examples include: Gioan Francesco Camocio, *Isole famose porti, fortezze, e terre marittime...*, Venice *c.* 1565-1574; Simon Pinargenti, *Isole che son da Venetia nella Dalmatia et per tutto l'Arcipelago, fino à Costantinopoli, con le loro fortezze, e con le terre più notabili di Dalmatia; nuouamente poste in disegno a beneficio de gli studiosi di Geografia*, Venice 1573; Sequanus Metellus, *Insularium, Orbis aliquot insularum, tabulis aeneis delineationem continens, in quo describuntur multae…insulae, operi geographico quo Europa, Asia, Africa et America…*, Cologne 1601.

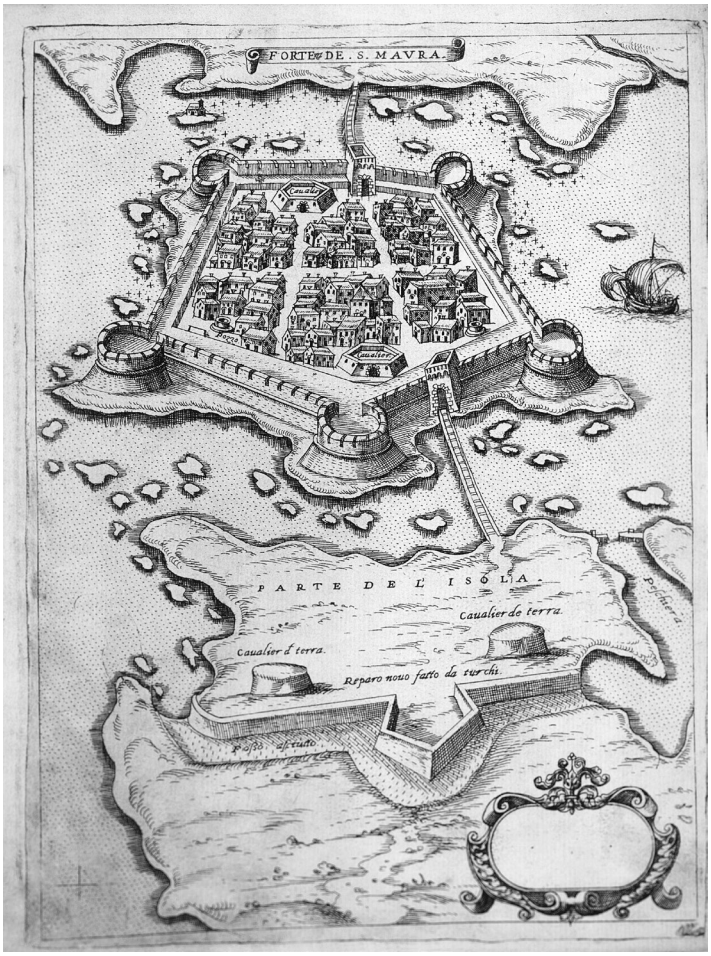


Fig. 7. Gioan Francesco Camocio, the island fortress of Lefkada (Santa Maura), *Isole famose, porti, fortezze, e terre maritime...*, Venice *c.* 1565-1574. Athens, Margarita Samourkas Collection.

The vogue of topical isolarii inspired some other works, such as Franco Ferretti's *Diporti noturni* [Night cruise], published in Ancona in 1579. Captain of the neo-crusade Florentine Order of Santo Stefano, Ferretti illustrated his text on an expedition against the Turks with 20 maps of Greek islands. Another end product appeared in 1598. It is Giuseppe Rosaccio's *Viaggio da Venetia a Constantinopoli per mare, e per terra*, published in Venice by Giacomo Franco. Rosaccio, a compiler of a common cosmographic vulgarisation, proposed yet another popular book whose contents are those of a typical

isolario of the Greek islands. Nevertheless, the work is disconnected from the genre and combined rather to the travel and pilgrimage literary traditions.[59]

All these isolario derivatives have a common basis: they are all related to the various bookish illustrations of maritime expansion, military, religious or literary. Their authors naturally adopted the isolario model in order to express and illustrate parallel or complementary issues of the same topic. The multiple isolario derivatives are proof of the grand vogue for the genre, but also of its drifting to the sidelines of formal cartography. Through diverse printed versions, the isolarii rose rapidly in popularity, and their character changed. Late sixteenth-century printed isolarii were disconnected from the primary objectives of the genre, the encyclopaedic charting of the seas through the cartographic description of its sole fixed positions, the islands. Gradually, they moved out towards the periphery of geographical literature as their authors concentrated on mythology and ethnographic curiosity, war information, pilgrimage practices and travel literature. A late manuscript isolario by Francesco Lupazolo illustrates well the slow decay of the genre.[60]

The work was compiled on Chios in 1638 and contains maps and descriptions of the Greek islands. Lupazolo's reports appear to be derived largely from first-hand observation, while its clumsy sketched maps were based on printed topical isolarii of the late sixteenth century. The book foreshadows certain changes in the manner of composition and the nature of the material. It carried on the old cosmographic pattern, but in both the text and the illustrations more space is given to visual testimony, especially on archaeological and ethnological matter. Six of the fifty-one illustrations are of historic monuments and traditional women's costumes worn on the islands of Chios, Milos and Naxos. Lupazolo's isolario heralded the travel literature on Greece and the Levant that came into vogue in the late seventeenth century. We can assume that the isolario was offered as a guide

[59] Giuseppe Rosaccio, *Viaggio da Venetia a Costantinopoli per mare e per terra, & insieme quello di Terra Santa. Da Gioseppe Rosaccio, con brevità descritto, nel quale, oltre à settantadui disegni, di geografia e corografia si discorre, quanto in esso viaggio si ritrova, cioè città, castelli, porti, golfi, isole, monti, fiumi e mari; opera utile à mercanti marinari, & à studiosi di geografia*, Venice: Giacomo Franco, 1598. Reissue (without maps) by Egidius Sadeler (1610).

[60] Francesco Lupazolo (or Lupazzoli, or Lupassoli, meaning literally "the lone wolf") was born at Casale Monferato in 1587 and served as consul of Venice at Smyrna between 1669 and 1702. His exceptionally long life, the subject of a memoir compiled by his son, was due to a combination of a strict diet regime and exceptional sexual activity: his offspring included 129 legitimate and natural children.

to the travellers Lupazolo was hosting as the Venetian consul in Smyrna. Indeed, parts of his isolario are included in Jean Thévenot's *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant*, published in Paris in 1644. We owe the last news of Lupazolo to one of the most notable of those travellers, the French naturalist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, who actually met him in Smyrna in 1702.

Although modest in appearance, Lupazolo's book on the Greek islands is a product of the new equilibrium in the Levant: the economic and strategic infiltration of the European West in the trading centres of the Ottoman Empire, through the development of the dense networks of commercial agents, consuls and missionaries. This permeation created a zone of Western economic interests on the shores and the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean and gradually shaped modern Levantine cosmopolitanism. The renewed Western interest in the Levant originated a wide range of publications in the late seventeenth century: travelogues, atlases and illustrated encyclopaedias succeeded the Levantine isolario.[61]

The momentary revival of the printed isolario in Venice in the second half of the seventeenth century did not manage to bring back the obsolete genre. Boschini's isolario was an expression of the author's dilettantish nostalgia for a vanishing breed,[62] while Piacenza's *L'Egeo redivivo* was an erudite eccentricity, a 700-page philological recapitulation of the isolario literature.[63] The edition was inspired by the Venetian victories in the Greek East during the war of 1684-1699, as was the case for Vincenzo Maria Coronelli's isolarii. They were aiming to celebrate Venice's provisional revival and they were related more closely to propaganda issues than to cosmography matters.[64]

The decline of the isolario is linked to the decline of cosmography in the late Renaissance and the advent of the atlas. In fact, the isolario could be

---

[61] Such as: Bernard Randolph, *The Present State of the Islands in the Archipelago…*, Oxford 1687; Jean de Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant…*, Paris 1665; Olfret Dapper, *Naukeurige. Beschryving der eilanden in de Archipel der Middelantsche Zee…*, Amsterdam 1688.

[62] Marco Boschini, *L'Arcipelago contutte le isole, scogli secche, e bassi fondi, con i mari, golfi, seni, porti, città, e castelli…*, Venice 1658. On this work, see Thodoris Koutsogiannis' introduction to the edition of the Greek translation of Boschini's isolario, Athens: Spanos, 2007.

[63] Francesco Piacenza, *L'Egeo redivivo ò sia chorographia dell'Arcipelago…*, Modena 1688.

[64] See Anastasia Stouraiti and Laura Marasso, *Immagini dal mito. La conquista veneziana della Morea (1684-1699)*, Venice: Fondazione Scientifica Querini Stampalia, 2001. See also Anastasia Stouraiti, "Colonial Mapping and Local Knowledge in the Venetian Empire, 1684-1715", *EUI Working Papers,* MWP 2008/15.

considered as one of the atlas' ancestors, yet another attempt to represent the then known world in the form of a series of maps bound together in a book.[65] The appearance of the first printed atlases in the last three decades of the sixteenth century did not cause the end of the isolario, which reached its peak during precisely this period, through Thevet's work. Nevertheless, the new genre caused a deep crisis in isolario production. The advent of the atlas did not resolve the problems of oceanic navigation, nor could it support efficiently maritime expansion. In the atlas' new, global unity of the world, the islands kept their autonomy. In fact, all the atlas-makers (Ortelius, Mercator, de Jode) incorporated in their works material borrowed from the isolarii: they included composite, mosaic maps, grouping islands of an archipelago. The isolario would finally be challenged by the new cartographic and geographic media of maritime expansion, the printed maritime atlases that appeared during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[66]

By the end of the seventeenth century, the main centres of isolario production had gone into an irreversible decline. Florence had long since lost its strategic role, and Venice was easing to the sidelines. Spain and Portugal still had some of their colonies, but their empires were radically challenged by French, Dutch and British ambitions. The isolario was becoming a thing of the past, and the various needs it had served in its own way had found other solutions. As Frank Lestringant pointed out, the time of the isolario was a period of mutation, due to an acceleration of history and a fragmentation of the world's image. The reestablishment of order led to a new perception of space, a new and stable organisation of power and knowledge.[67]

Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

---

[65] James R. Akerman, "From Books with Maps to Books as Maps: The Editor in the Creation of the Atlas Idea", in Joan Winearls (ed.), *Editing Early and Historical Atlases*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995, pp. 3-48.

[66] The first printed nautical atlas was the *Water-weereld* [Sea world], published by Johannes Janssonius in 1650, as part of the fifth volume of his *Atlas novus*. See Peter van der Krogt, *Koeman's Atlantes Neerlandici*, 3 vols, 't Goy-Houten: HES & De Graaf Publishers, 1997-2003, Vol. 1, pp. 404-405. See also Günter Schilder and Marco van Egmond, "Maritime Cartography in the Low Countries during the Renaissance", in Woodward (ed.), *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, p. 1401.

[67] Lestringant, "Le monde ouvert", p. 21.