

From the Mediterranean to the World: A Note on the Italian “Book of Islands” (*isolario*)

Theodore J. Cachey Jr.

The “book of islands,” or *isolario*, a novel form of cartographic book combining maps and narrative-historical chorography, was invented and initially developed in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to R.A. Skelton, “like the *portolano*, or pilot-book, to which it was related, it had its origins in the Mediterranean, as an illustrated guide for travelers in the Aegean Archipelago and the Levant.”¹ The first “book of islands” was authored by a Florentine ecclesiastic named Cristoforo Buondelmonti, a precursor of Cyriac of Ancona, whom Roberto Weiss characterized as “the first to, besides show interest in Greek antiquities, observed them with the eyes and inquisitive spirit of humanism.”² Buondelmonti spent six years, between 1414 and 1420, traveling in the Aegean and wrote both a *Descriptio insulae Cretae* [Description of the Island of Crete] (1417) and the *Liber insularum archipelagi* [Book of Islands of the Archipelago]. Buondelmonti dedicated the latter, which featured 79 maps dispersed throughout it, to the humanist bibliophile Cardinal Giordano Orsini and forwarded it to him in Rome in 1420.³

¹ Benedetto Bordone, *Libro de tutte l'isole del mondo* (Venice 1528). Introduction by R.A. Skelton. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., 1966, v. For an insightful and suggestive discussion of the “book of islands” and of Bartolomeo da li Sonetti’s *isolario* in particular, see Tom Conley, “Virtual Reality and the *Isolario*,” in *L’odeporica=Hodoeporics: On Travel Literature*. Ed. Luigi Monga. *Annali d’italianistica*, vol. 14. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1966, 121-30. See also Frank Lestringant, *Le livre des îles: atlas et récits insulaires de la Genèse à Jules Verne*. Genève: Droz, 2002. For a brief overview of the “book of islands” in the context of Renaissance Italian cartography and literature, see Theodore J. Cachey Jr., “Maps and Literature in Renaissance Italy,” in *The History of Cartography, Volume 3. Cartography in the European Renaissance*. Ed. David Woodward. University of Chicago Press, 2007, 450-460. For the most up-to-date and thorough treatment of the genre currently available, see the excellent chapter by George Toliás, “*Isolarii*, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century,” in *The History of Cartography, Volume 3*, cit., 263-84.

² R. Weiss, “Un umanista antiquario: Cristoforo Buondelmonti,” *Lettere italiane*, 16 (1964): 105-116; H. Turner, “Christopher Buondelmonti and the *Isolario*,” *Terrae Incognitae*, 19 (1987): 11-28. A recent facsimile edition is: *Cristoforo Buondelmonti: liber insularum archipelagi; Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf Ms. G 13, Faksimile*. Ed. Irmgard Siebert; Max Plassmann; Arne Effenberger; Fabian Rijkers. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005. A transcription and commentary on the Düsseldorf ms. is *Liber insularum archipelagi: Transkription des Exemplars Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf Ms. G 13, Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Ed. Karl Bayer. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007. Earlier editions are: *Christoph. Bondelmontii, Florentini, Librum insularum archipelagi*. Ed. G R Ludwig von Sinner. Lipsiae; et Berolini: Apud G. Reimer, 1824; and *Description des îles de l’archipel*. Ed. Émile Legrand. Paris: E. Leroux, 1897.

³ The work was enlarged, altered, emended and improved throughout the fifteenth century. It is known in 64 manuscripts, only thirteen fewer than Marco Polo’s travels. It enjoyed an immense success during the Renaissance in Italy, in the Aegean, and also in other countries. No less than three vernacular translations of the *Liber* were done in Italy during the Quattrocento; and there was a translation in Greek during the fifteenth century, and one in English during the sixteenth. For the most critical recent treatment, see Toliás, “*Isolarii*,” cit., 265-68.



Figure 1. Santorini. *Liber insularum archipelagi*. Buondelmonti. P/13(11V) P/13(11v). Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, London U.K.

The first printed *isolario* also focused on the Aegean and derived much of its content and maps from Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum archipelagi*. It appeared around 1485 and was authored by a Venetian ship captain who adopted the pen name Bartolomeo da li Sonetti, in allusion to the sonnets that accompany the book's 48 woodcut maps. Bartolomeo da li Sonetti's "book of islands" was published about the same time that Henricus Martellus Germanus, a German Benedictine working in Florence, was introducing into his five manuscript recensions of Buondelmonti's *Liber* (sometime between 1480 and 1490; also known as the *Insularium*

illustratum), a world map, and additional chorographic maps of regions and islands (including maps from Ptolemy) in a manner very much like that of an atlas.⁴



Figure 2. Santorini. *Isolario. da li Sonetti. P/21(17) P/21(17)*. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, London U.K.

⁴ See Add. 15,760 of the British Library. Another example is in the Bell Library at the University of Minnesota (B1475). Donnus (Dominus) Nicolaus Germanus, a manuscript illuminator who prepared maps to accompany his manuscripts, was probably a Benedictine. In the period of the 1460s and 1470s he produced at least twelve different manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Geographia*, signing all but two. His handling of Buondelmonti's *isolario* is worth further investigation for the development *in fieri* of the relationship between geography influenced by Ptolemy and the chorographic tradition of the "book of islands" during the fifteenth century. For discussion, see *Firenze e la scoperta dell'America. Umanesimo e geografia nel '400 fiorentino*. Catalogo a cura di Sebastiano Gentile. Firenze: Olschki, 1992, n. 113, 237-240. For the most recent treatment of the Martellus additions to the *Liber insularum*, see Tolias, "Isolarii," cit., 266-268. See also Evelyn Edson, *The World Map 1300-1492. The Persistence of Tradition and Transformation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, 215-219.

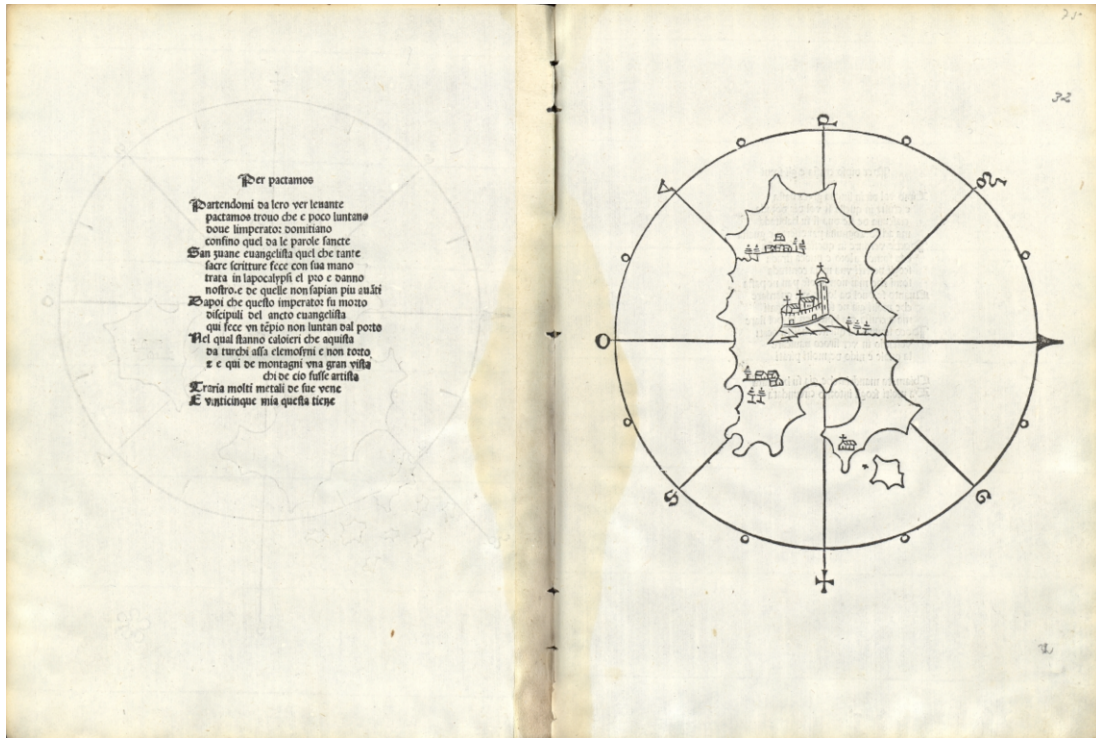


Figure 3. *Patmos. Isolario. da li Sonetti. 1485. N.Ink73.k32. Courtesy of the National Library of Finland, University of Helsinki.*

The “book of islands” was eventually superseded as a cartographic genre, as was the *Geographia* of Ptolemy, by the modern atlas; it persists even after Abraham Ortelius’s 1570 *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, but at the margins rather than at the center of the history of cartography. While the *isolario*, Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, and the “modern” atlas coexist for some time, the gradual eclipse of the “book of islands”⁵ at one level reflected a progressive decentering of the Mediterranean that occurred within the broader context of early modern history, following the Atlantic discoveries. But well before that happened, in conjunction with the culminating moment of the discoveries and exploration period and at the height of the high Renaissance, the second printed “book of islands” appeared in 1528 in Venice published by Zoppino: the *Libro di Benedetto Bordone nel qual si ragiona de tutte l’isole del mondo* [Book of Benedetto Bordone in which are discussed all the islands of the world]. As the title suggests, this *isolario* provided even broader coverage than the Martellus recensions of Buondelmonti and gave special prominence to the islands of the New World, which are featured in the first and longest of the work’s three books, including the recently conquered island-city of Tenochtitlan (1521).

⁵ For an influential critique of a notion of the history of cartography as a linear progression, see Matthew H. Edney, “‘Cartography without Progress’: Reinterpreting the Nature and Historical Development of Mapmaking.” *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 30 2 (1993): 54-68.

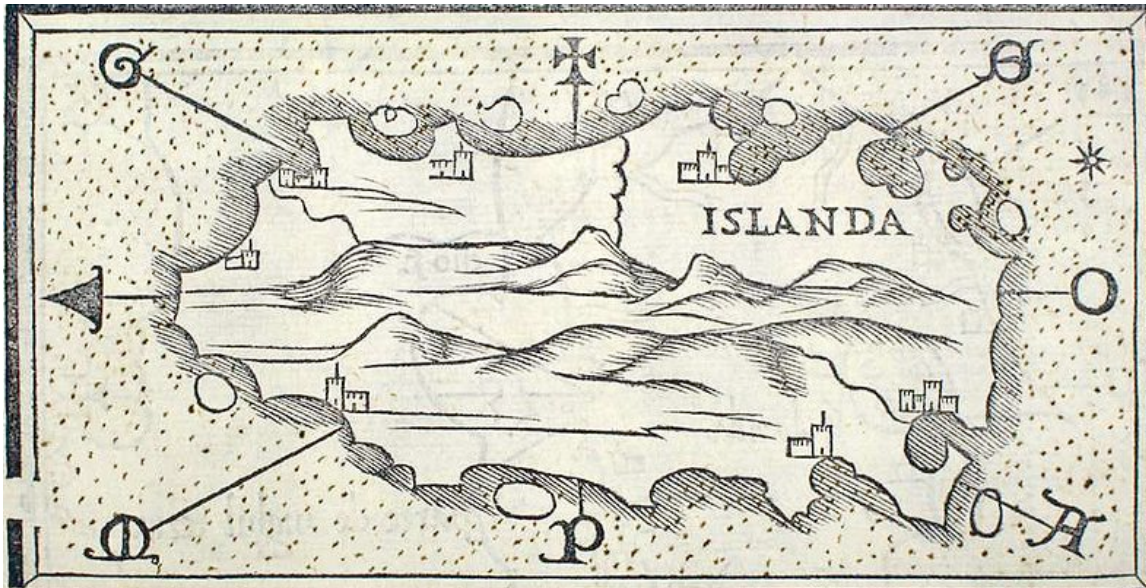


Figure 4. Iceland. Bordone. kort.bok.hi.is. (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Iceland).

At about the same time that the first “global” *isolario* was printed in Venice, Antonio Pigafetta’s first-hand narrative of the Magellan-Elcano circumnavigation of the globe (1519-1522) was published. The manuscript book of the Vicentine traveler featured 23 hand-drawn water-colored charts interspersed like so many islands among the sea of prose narrative. While Pigafetta’s “book of islands” has more often than not been overlooked by historians of cartography in their treatments of the *isolario*,⁶ the work might plausibly claim to be the genre’s most significant issue from a literary historical perspective in light of the stature and significance of Pigafetta’s narrative, which Boies Penrose famously rated as rivaling Columbus’s *Journal* and Vasco da Gama’s *Roteiro* in the annals of the literature of discovery.⁷ At the very least, Pigafetta’s manuscript book *isolario* represents an important and underappreciated chapter in the history of the genre’s development in relation to both the history of literature and the history of cartography.

⁶ Tolias’s otherwise comprehensive article in the *History of Cartography, Volume 3*, cit., does not acknowledge or explore Pigafetta’s relation to the “book of islands” genre. See Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Around the World, 1519-1522*. Ed. Theodore J. Cachey Jr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. This English language edition, which reproduces the maps from the Ambrosiana Library’s apograph manuscript of the work, is based on the most authoritative edition currently available: *Primo viaggio intorno al mondo*. Testo critico e commento di Andrea Canova. Padova: Antenore, 1999.

⁷ Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance 1420-1620*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952, 302.



Figure 5. Pigafetta's chart of the three "Islands of Thieves." L103Sup (3). Courtesy of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan Italy.

The book was presented in manuscript around 1524 to the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitaller of Rhodes, who happened to be a French nobleman named Philippe Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, after several years of trials and tribulations during which the author toured the principal courts of Europe and Italy in search of an appropriate publication venue and patronage. The Grand Master was living at the time outside Viterbo at Monterosso, due to the fact that the Knights had been forced from Rhodes in 1522 by the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent; they would become the Knights of Malta when Charles V granted them Malta in 1530. The early modern, in particular, the French reception of the "book of islands" during the sixteenth century, for example in Rabelais and Thevet,⁸ ultimately traces its source to the fact that the work's original patron was a Frenchman. Pigafetta's book was rapidly translated into French, and the *editio princeps* was published without maps by Colines in Paris around 1525. The French translation served as the basis for Ramusio's subsequent retranslation back into Italian, which was first published in Venice in 1535. The text of Pigafetta's narrative that appeared subsequently, until the 19th century in printed editions without maps, derived in one way or another from Giovanni Battista Ramusio's 1555 map-less publication of the work in his *Navigazioni* (1555). The recent authoritative edition accomplished by Andrea Canova (1999) continues a tradition of presenting the work without maps, a legacy of transmission that has effectively obscured its original generic collocation as a "book of islands."

Yet Pigafetta's book is well worth restoring to the canon of classic Italian Renaissance "books of islands," especially since the genre continues to represent an engaging and not yet

⁸ See Tom Conley, *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

fully exploited resource for historians of literature, of cartography and space. The importance of the genre derives in particular from the way in which the *isolario* provides a window on the relationship between literature and cartography during the age of discovery, which witnessed the shift from medieval or premodern place to early modern space. The transition from manuscript to print, for example, played a vital role in the production of a new literary space, which is reflected in the history of the “book of islands” that alternates between manuscript and print forms of publication between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. Pigafetta’s pre-publication history is exemplary in this respect. He had initially arranged for a Venetian printed edition of his book under the patronage of the Marquis of Mantua, but the project fell through for reasons that remain unclear. It is likely the benefice that Pigafetta was granted by the Knights of Rhodes proved to be a more advantageous arrangement for the author.⁹ In any event, the manuscript “book of islands” originally pertained to the realm of place, or what Ptolemy termed chorography in contrast to geography,¹⁰ that is, what the contemporary philosopher Edward Casey has characterized as the realm of art.¹¹ The Quattrocento rediscovery and circulation of Ptolemy’s *Geography* and the maps that accompanied that text, by contrast, rapidly led to the representation and conceptualization of abstract space divided by the reticulated grid characteristic of the modern geographical atlas and fostered the development of mathematically and scientifically-based representations of space.

The Italian geographer and philosopher Franco Farinelli has observed how, “[b]efore the atlas, there were only books of islands consisting of maps and descriptions in which the entire globe, beginning from the Mediterranean, was broken down into islands, into something that before containing something, were instead, by definition, contained by something else, the sea. Islands were all considered to be emerged lands (*terre emerse*), from the smallest to the largest, including those recently discovered in the Western ocean. Furthermore, there is one difference between an atlas and a book of islands: in the former, the globe is transformed into space, while in the book of islands, on the contrary, that transformation is not complete and the emerged lands are still considered places.”¹² It is interesting to note in this connection that the first map of Antonio Pigafetta’s “book of islands” represents the entire South American continent as an island, or at least as a very large peninsula, nearly contained by the sea.

⁹ For a reconstruction of the complicated patronage circumstances surrounding the publication of Pigafetta’s “book of islands,” see Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage*, cit., xxxix-xlv.

¹⁰ See Ptolemy’s *Geography. An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*. Ed. J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, 58: “Regional cartography [*chorographia*] deals above all with the qualities rather than the quantities of things it sets down; it attends everywhere to likeness, and not so much to proportional placements. World cartography [*geographia*] on the other hand, [deals] with the quantities more than the qualities, since it gives consideration to the proportionality of distances for all things, but to likeness only as far as the coarser outlines [of the features], and only with respect to mere shape. Consequently regional cartography requires landscape drawing, and no one but a man skilled in drawing would do regional cartography.... For these reasons, [regional cartography] has no need of mathematical method, but here [in world cartography] this element takes absolute precedence.”

¹¹ See Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 191: “It is the spectacle of a projection that, unlike the projection of the whole earth onto a world map, is local in scope as well as pictorially persuasive. Thus, even if portolan charts are only imperfectly projective in a strictly geometrical sense, they are vividly and successfully projective in a topographical and chorographical respect. They are maps of places rather than of sites.”

¹² Franco Farinelli, *Geografia. Un’introduzione ai modelli del mondo*. Torino: Einaudi, 2003, 11.



Figure 6. Pigafetta's chart of the Strait of Patagonia. Ambrosiana Library, L 103 Sup. Courtesy of the Ambrosiana Library. Milan, Italy.

To trace the development and global extension of the *isolario* genre is, from an epistemological perspective, to witness in terms of the history of cartography a capital example of what Casey has described as “the remarkable elasticity of scope of the employment of cartographic images.”¹³ According to a historical itinerary that moves from the Mediterranean to the world, the book of islands departs from the Aegean at the very heart of Mediterranean culture and, by way of the Venetian lagoon, comes to encompass all of the “islands of the world” in Bordone’s printed *isolario*. In Pigafetta’s manuscript book, it captures in its capacious embrace the third of the three great “Mediterraneans” of the globe identified by Pierre Deffontaines (besides the one constituted by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean), located between the southeast China Sea and the Indonesian and Philippine seas.¹⁴

From this perspective on the genre’s global extension, it is worth recalling that the invention of the “book of islands” by Buondelmonti during the first decades of the fifteenth century coincided with the “re-discovery” of Ptolemy that took place in humanistic Florence at the same time.¹⁵ A contemporary of Poggio Bracciolini, with connections to the humanist bibliophile circle

¹³ Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place*, cit., 185.

¹⁴ See Pierre Deffontaines, *El Mediterráneo: estudio de geografía humana*. Barcelona: Editorial Juventud, 1948. Cited in Farinelli, *Geografia*, cit., “Mediterraneo e mediterranei,” 98-99.

¹⁵ Jacobus Angelus finished his Latin translation of the *Geographia* from a Greek manuscript that has not survived around 1410. This translation, dedicated to Alexander V, who was pope from 1409 to 1410, was widely circulated in manuscript. For the most up-to-date discussion of Ptolemy and his influence on Renaissance cartography, geography

of Niccolò Niccoli, Buondelmonti fused the humanist genres of geographical encyclopedia compendia (such as Boccaccio's *De monitibus*) and the humanist travel narrative (going back to Petrarch's *Itinerarium*) with contemporary sailing charts and portolans. Buondelmonti's invention of the "book of islands," however mysterious its origins, ought to be viewed from its beginnings in relation to the contemporary development of "modern," mathematically informed cartography inspired by the recovery of Ptolemy that was emerging at that time within the same cultural environment. A humanistic literary preoccupation with place that characterizes the *isolario* from the beginning can be understood to offer a measure of resistance to more scientific developments in mapping that went hand in hand during the Renaissance period with the new geographical discoveries. Juergen Schultz, in a justly renowned essay, once drew a distinction in the history of cartography between "technical" and "didactic" maps, that is, maps made for geographical accuracy as opposed to maps made for contemplation.¹⁶ Schultz distinguished between medieval ideological mapping of various types on the one hand and more scientific forms of mapping based on measurement. The *isolarii* were intended first and foremost as objects of contemplation in Schultz's sense of the term and only secondarily for their geographical accuracy. For instance, there are typically few measurements given. At most, the orientation of the islands is provided, as in Sonetti, in relation to compass points. In this respect, it is worth noting that the charts of the circumnavigating traveler Pigafetta are more conservative than his narrative, which regularly provides locations according to latitude and longitude. Indeed, the very purpose of the Magellan expedition was to determine if the Maluccas were located on the Portuguese or Spanish side of the line of demarcation.

But it was not just the book of islands that had to face the challenge of the new discoveries and of Ptolemaic mapping. The entire Italian literary system in both Latin and the vernacular struggled to come to terms with the emergence of modern space in its midst, which in terms of intellectual history meant the reintroduction of Ptolemy's mathematically based geography and its accompanying cartography. Arguably the most arresting example of the Italian literary system's attempt to accommodate these new developments was Francesco Berlinghieri's massive translation of Ptolemy into *terza rima* published in 1482. This remarkable enterprise ultimately traced its vernacular literary inspiration to Dante's *Commedia* and to Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo*. In imitation of Dante, Berlinghieri featured himself in the role of poet-protagonist, while Ptolemy is assigned a role akin to Dante's guide Virgil and Fazio's Solinus. Berlinghieri's *Septe giornate* represented the end of the road for an illustrious Tuscan tradition of vernacular geographical poetry. It pointed to the "illegibility" or "untranslatability" to the literary realm of the new scientific approaches to geographical mapping.¹⁷ Meanwhile, symptomatic of its compelling new authority in the culture, scientific and mathematically based mapping directly invaded even the literary realm of Dante's *Commedia* at this time. The cartography of Dante's hell, a subgenre of Dante studies, was initiated at this time by Brunelleschi and would be continued during the Renaissance by Galileo and many others. The first mathematically

and culture, see Patrick Gautier Dalché, "The Reception of Ptolemy's Geography (End of the Fourteenth to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century)," *The History of Cartography, Volume 3*, cit., 285-364.

¹⁶ "Jacopo de' Barbari's View of Venice: Map Making, City Views, and Moralized Geography Before the Year 1500." *The Art Bulletin*, 60 3 (Sept. 1978): 425-474, especially pp. 454ff: "Whereas map makers of the early sixteenth century were increasingly governed in their work by the search for accuracy, it was still possible at this time for collectors to look on maps as subjects for contemplation."

¹⁷ See Angela Codazzi, "Berlinghieri, Francesco." *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-) 9, 121-4. For the notion of Berlinghieri's "illegibility," see Amedeo Quondam, "(De)scrivere la terra: il discorso geografico da Tolomeo all'Atlante." *Culture et société en Italie du Moyen-âge à la Renaissance, Hommage à André Rochon*. Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1985, 11-35 (15).

contrived maps of the *Inferno* were published in a 1506 edition of the *Commedia* edited by Girolamo Benivieni with maps and a dialogue, featuring Antonio Manetti's theories, "circa al sito, forma, et misure del lo inferno di Dante" [on the site, form, and measurements of Dante's hell].¹⁸

Da li Sonetti's translation of Buondelmonti's "book of islands" into a cycle of sonnets in Venice represented in its way an expression of the same desire to reconcile contemporary geographical knowledge to Italian vernacular traditions of geographical poetry that Berlinghieri's poetic Ptolemy expressed. But while the tradition of Tuscan geographical poetry would not survive the Quattrocento, the prose book of islands did, thanks especially to the Venetian print culture that was responsible for da li Sonetti and that produced Bordone's High Renaissance print *isolario*. As mentioned, the print genre "book of islands" would endure in fact, albeit at the margins of modern cartography and literature, in multiple editions of Bordone, which were followed by the no less successful Tommaso Porcacchi's *L'isole più famose del mondo* (1572; with copper-plate engravings), a line that continued through the seventeenth century as far as the *Isolario dell'Atlante Veneto* (1696), the last of the book of islands, which featured 310 maps and island views by the last Italian cartographer of European resonance Vincenzo Coronelli, who might be considered the Metastasio of Italian cartography.¹⁹

But just as with other major literary fields of endeavor including the political (Machiavelli), the pastoral (Sannazzaro), the courtly-bureaucratic (Castiglione), and the epic-novellistic (Ariosto), the *isolario* produced its masterpieces in the discoveries and travel writing field (alongside Columbus, Vespucci, and Verrazzano) during the High Renaissance. In this sense, Bordone, on the one hand, and Pigafetta, on the other, represent watershed moments in the history of literature and cartography within the history of the early modern production of space at the intersection of chorography and geography.²⁰ Thus, Pigafetta's "First Voyage" and Bordone's "All the Islands in the World" present complementary issues of the Renaissance Italian *isolario* genre, in so far as the first takes the form of a first-person travel narrative in manuscript and the other that of an encyclopedic print compilation of maps. In fact, both aspects central to the genre's original inspiration and identity in Buondelmonti, the first-hand travel narrative and the visual medium of maps, find their fullest expression in Pigafetta's first-person account of the circumnavigation and in Bordone's attempt to bring to his readers the virtual experience of "all of the islands of the world." The book of islands recorded for the benefit of the

¹⁸ For a recent discussion of Renaissance Dante mapping and an up-to-date bibliography on the topic, see Ricardo Padrón, "Mapping Imaginary Worlds," in *Maps. Finding Our Place in the World*. Ed. James R. Akerman and Robert W. Karrow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 255-87. See also Theodore J. Cachey Jr., "Cartographic Dante." *Italica* (forthcoming, 2010).

¹⁹ Vincenzo Coronelli, the last inheritor of the cartographical knowledge of Italy, who the Sun King commissioned in 1681 to construct globes that no one in Italy wanted to have made according to Franco Farinelli, *Geografia*, cit., (153): "chiamata che illustra in maniera esemplare la definitiva perdita del primato rinascimentale dell'Italia per quanto riguarda il controllo del mondo e la conoscenza dei suoi meccanismi, e il suo trasferimento alle città dell'Europa continentale."

²⁰ See Toliás, *Isolarii*, cit., 272-84, for these and other later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *isolarii*. The "book of islands" is a good test-case for analyzing the relation between text and map in so far as it enacts a transition from reading to seeing that reverses the order of a medieval *mappamundi*, where the transition of seeing to reading takes place, that is, according to Christian Jacob, "instantaneousness gives way to a progressive decipherment" (249). See Jacob's chapter on "Maps and Writing," in *The Sovereign Map. Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Through History*. Transl. Tom Conley. Ed. Edward H. Dahl. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 189-268. Jacob's discussion ends with the example of Vincenzo Coronelli's monumental terrestrial globes on which "the reader is offered veritable treatises on geography." One recalls that Coronelli was the author as well of the last of the great "books of islands," a genre that is also important for the history of the dialectic between maps and writing that goes back to medieval *mappamundi*.

sovereign the report of the first circumnavigation of the globe at the same time that it provided a means for the bourgeois reader to vicariously experience “first-hand” all the islands of the world according to the order of the journey. In the transition from manuscript to print, the reader’s gaze substitutes for the sovereign’s and the subject who writes the travel account is replaced by the compiler.

In both cases, it should be recalled, the genre reveals its conservative nature and its resistance to the emergence of early modern space at the very moment of the first circumnavigation of the globe. Even as that space is being boldly opened up for exploitation and colonization, the ideologically anodyne aspect of the “book of islands” genre is reflected for example in Pigafetta’s attempt to fashion a hagiographic portrait of the Portuguese Magellan and himself as supra-national heroes of the voyage – a rhetorical approach that apparently received a very mixed reception at the imperial court of the Hapsburg Charles V. Indeed, as Pigafetta himself informs us, he was turned away by the emperor and by the sovereigns of Portugal and France before finally turning to the dispossessed Knights of Rhodes for patronage. Bordone’s neutral presentation of the conquest of Mexico in his *isolario* has been noted by Conley and before him by Marziano Guglielminetti, who observed that “the Todorovian question of the other is not posed by Bordone’s *isolario* in so far as the perception of modernity does not include a conflict of cultures, of civilizations, or of faiths. One suspects that the success of this and the other islands books . . . is to be attributed to the substantially passive and unproblematic character of their reception and presentation of the new.”²¹

This critical perspective on the genre is not inconsistent with the notion of the role of the “book of islands” as a place of humanistic and literary resistance to the emergence of modern colonial space. In fact, in the years between 1528 and 1573, Conley writes, “When the *isolario* makes its way into mid-century [French] literary creations, the cosmographic or universal view, shared by the analogical style and the world map, is attenuated.”²² Pigafetta’s book, meanwhile, had an impact on Shakespeare who found there on the shores of Patagonia the name “Setebos” for Caliban’s god: “Oh Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed! How fine my master is! I am afraid/ He will chastise me. (5.1. 261-63). So that it might be said that Pigafetta taught Shakespeare’s Caliban how to curse. Gabriel García Márquez for his part, according to the testimony of his 1982 Nobel lecture, found in Pigafetta no less than the seeds of the modern Latin American novel and of “magical realism.”²³ In this sense, the legacy of literary commitment to place that characterized the Italian book of islands might be said to have endured alongside and in counterpoint to the development of modern colonial space. This perhaps accounts for the genre’s renewed resonance and interest as a topic of research for historians of literature and cartography seeking to understand the interplay of local-regional and global interactions, representations, and identities within the context of contemporary “glocal” society.

²¹ Marziano Guglielminetti, “Il Messico a Venezia nel 1528: Benedetto Bordon e Hernan Cortes,” in *L’impatto della scoperta dell’America nella cultura veneziana*. Ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò. Roma: Bulzoni, 1990, 107-14.

²² Conley, *The Self-Made Map*, cit., p. 169.

²³ See Gabriel García Márquez, “The Solitude of America.” Nobel lecture, 1982, trans. Marina Castañeda, in *Gabriel García Márquez and the Powers of Fiction*. Ed. Julio Ortega. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988, 88-89. See also “Fantasia y creation en América Latina y el Caribe.” *Texto Critico* 14 (1979): 3-8.

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