Definitions and Origins

A first reaction to the “island books” known as isolarii is likely to be one of amazement and perplexity. The isolarii do not readily fit into the pattern of geographical literature we are used to: they seem to reflect an “underground” geographical culture, an unfamiliar kind of geography that flourished in the experimental and tolerant climate of the Renaissance but has now slipped out of our grasp. And the isolario did in fact die out without ever establishing its place in the official canon of geography, even though up to a certain time it was integrally linked with the early development of that science. That is why so much has been said and written about the origins of isolarii.¹

Historians of cartography who have studied the various manifestations of the genre, especially those of the early period, have come up with many interpretations. Some, centering their analysis on the cartographic material of the isolarii, see them as early examples of regional island atlases.² Others, concentrating chiefly on the narrative material of the isolarii, consider them a subdivision of travel literature or of the literature of the Turkish-Venetian rivalry in the Aegean islands, Crete and Cyprus.³ Others regard them as expressions of Renaissance “singularity,” while others see them as primitive tourist guides.⁴ In addition, various assessments have been made of the political content often found in isolarii.⁵

What is remarkable is that these explanations (which do, in fact, tally with the several functions of isolarii, varying with the communities that produced and used them) are all perfectly valid interpretations of this protean genre, which displayed such astonishing typological mutiformity during its long lifetime of three hundred years. This fact is explained in part by the peculiarity of the genre—a genre that belongs somewhere within the shadowy bounds of geographical, historical, and travel literature and nautical manuals—and in part by the inherent fluidity of the discipline of geography.⁶


The conventional term *isolario* is used to denote manuscript or printed atlases that—regardless of title, format, or structure, and of whether a work contained text—consist of maps, mostly of islands but also of coastal areas of the mainland, arranged in the form of a thematic encyclopedia. Their authors, in the early period, called their works “books of islands,” “island chorographies,” or “island navigations.” The Latin term *insularium* was used by the end of the fifteenth century, and its Italian version, *isolario*, seems to have come into use by 1534.

There is a wide range of geographical, historical, and literary works on subjects connected with islands that are closely related to *isolario*. Travelers’ memoirs; chronicles of sea voyages, exploration, and discovery; cosmographic and utopian writings; and accounts of military and naval engagements on or near islands were often influenced by *isolario* and sometimes supplied them with information of one kind or another. Those works are unquestionably products of the same climate that produced the *isolarii*, and they often have the flavor of an *isolario*. However, they cannot be included in the canon of the genre described here because each of them conforms to the constants and specifications of some other genre. The *isolario* is a cosmographic encyclopedia of islands, with maps: a specific genre that flourished in the Mediterranean region (the main centers were Florence and Venice) from the early fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, covering a wide range of learned, practical, and informational needs (for a classification of the genre, see fig. 8.8).

The roots of the *isolario* have to be sought in the geographical baggage of the period. The ancient world certainly had a particularly close association with islands, which had a prominent place in ancient geographical literature. Aristotle, in *De mundo*, summarizes the ancient geographers’ methodologies, remarking that some deal with all the islands together as a separate entity, while others treat them in the chapters on the nearest area of the mainland.

Obviously the geographers in the first group interest us more than the others. Among them is Dionysius Periegetes, who devoted a whole section (lines 450–619) of his *Oikoumenēs Perieígēs* to the islands. This work, written in A.D. 124, is a synoptic geographical poem of 1,186 lines describing the world as the ancients knew it in fairly conventional terms. Dionysius, a contemporary of Ptolemy and also of Marinus of Tyre, gives a picture of the world that was already outdated in his time, but his poem was used as a standard textbook for centuries. First translated into Latin in the fourth century, it appeared in two more Latin translations in the sixth century, and the extensive commentary by Eustathios in the twelfth century added what was needed for the teaching of geography in the Middle Ages, in both the Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East. The most conspicuous merit of this poem is the clarity with which subjects are explained in a few words. We know from various sources that the poem was often learned by heart. The maps that went with the manuscripts of the text have not survived. However, the presence of echoes of Dionysius here and there in Renaissance geographical literature (especially in *isolarii* by Cristoforo Buondelmonti, Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, Tommaso Porcacchi, and Vincenzo Coronelli), coupled with the fact that the first printed *isolario* was also in verse, strengthens the hypothesis that the *isolarii* were inspired by Dionysius’s work and by medieval geographical textbooks. This mnemonic aspect of the *isolarii* was the main reason for their wide diffusion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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7. The existence of manuscript copies or translations without maps of some *isolarii* does not affect this definition: no *isolario* has yet been found that, in its full form, does not contain maps. For a similar definition see also Massimo Donattini, “Bartolomeo da li Sonetti, il suo *Isolario* e un viaggio di Giovanni Bembo (1525–1530),” *Geographia Antiqua* 3–4 (1994–95): 211–36, esp. 211–12.

8. Homer’s Odyssey was a very early mythological “isolario,” and ancient scholars are known to have devoted much attention to Homer’s island mythology: see Francesco Prontera, “*Geographie et mythes dans l’Isolario* des Grecs,” in *Géographie du monde*, 169–79, esp. 171. On the position and role of islands in ancient Greek literature, see Francesco Prontera, “*Isel*,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauzer et al. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–), 18:311–28.


The connection between the earlier geographical tradition (which treated islands as separate entities) and isolario (from Buondelmonti onward) came into being gradually in the context of early Florentine humanism. In Florence, Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca) and Giovanni Boccaccio laid the foundations for the humanistic rediscovery of the ancient world and provided the driving force for a vigorous burst of scholarly activity, one outcome of which was Domenico Silvestri’s book “De insulis,” written about 1385–1406.14 This was a learned island dictionary following the methodology of Boccaccio’s “De montibus, silvis, fontibus,” to which it was a sort of supplement. The islands and a considerable number of peninsulas (in Greek the term νησίδες covers both islands and peninsulas) are dealt with in alphabetical order in a text running to several hundred pages.15 Silvestri’s interests reflect the scholastic approach of the fifteenth-century Florentine humanists: he lists the names of each island as found in ancient and modern literary sources, describes the terrain, gives the position and size of each island, and names all the authors he has consulted (mostly ancient, but also some medieval travelers).

The Birth of the Genre: Florence, Fifteenth Century

Cristoforo Buondelmonti

It was in the context of the geographical and antiquarian interests of Florentine humanism that the isolario came to life and flourished during the fifteenth century.16 The first example of the genre was the “Liber insularum arcipelagii” by the Florentine monk Cristoforo Buondelmonti.17 It appeared in several versions in Rhodes and Constantinople around 1420 and was thoroughly in keeping with the geographical interests of early Florentine humanism.18 It may be described as a randomly arranged encyclopedic and antiquarian atlas of the Greek islands and is of the utmost interest for the historical geography and the archeology of the region.19

Of the surviving versions of the “Liber insularum,” the fullest contains maps and descriptions of seventy-nine places in the Ionian and Aegean seas: most are islands, some are groups of islets, and there are also a few important coastal places, including Constantinople, Gallipoli, the shores of the Dardanelles, Mount Athos, and Athens (fig. 8.1).20 The author’s name, the date of composition, and the dedication of the work are encoded in an acrostic composed of the initial letters of the seventy-six chapters of the book. The choice of islands and the order in which they appear are not governed by any strict geographical criteria, nor do they represent a likely itinerary through Greek waters. Most probably the material was built up gradually in the course of the author’s peregrinations.21

14. See Domenico Silvestri, De insulis et earum proprietatibus, ed. Carmela Pecoraro (Palermo: Presso l’Accademia, 1953), and also Maria Milanesi, “Il De insulis et earum proprietatibus di Domenico Silvestri (1385–1406),” Geographia Antiqua 2 (1993): 133–46. Mention should also be made of Domenico Bandini’s “De populis, de aedificis, de provincis, de civitatibus, de insulis,” written at about the same time as Silvestri’s “De insulis,” which treats the geographical material in the thematic order. One copy of “De populis” is included in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana’s MS. Lat. X 124 (= 3177) as an introduction to Buondelmonti’s “Liber insularum,” which seems to confirm that Bandini’s geography book and Buondelmonti’s isolario were regarded by contemporary readers as two of a kind. On Silvestri and Bandini, see Nathalie Bouloux, Culture et savoirs géographiques en Italie au XIVe siècle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 220–35, and José Manuel Montesdeoca Medina, “Los islaarios de la época del humanismo: El ‘De Insulis’ de Domenico Silvestri, edición y traducción” (Ph.D. diss., Universidad de La Laguna, 2001).


18. On the geographical interests of the Florentine scholars who edited the works of ancient writers on geography, made Ptolemy widely known in the West, and also introduced geographical techniques of a more practical kind, see Thomas Goldstein, “Geography in Fifteenth-Century Florence,” in Merchants & Scholars: Essays in the History of Exploration and Trade, Collected in Memory of James Ford Bell, ed. John Parker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 9–32. See also Leonardo Rombai, Alle origini della cartografia Toscana: Il sapere geografico nella Firenze del ‘400 (Florence: Istituto Interfacoltà di Geografia, 1992), and chapter 9 in this volume.


20. The shortest version does not cover the islets of Polimoi, Caloiero (off Andros), Antiparos, Panagia, Caloiero (off Cos), or Sanctus Illas, nor does it cover the island of Aegina. The manuscript tradition of Buondelmonti’s “Liber insularum” has long been a subject of debate. According to Robert Weiss (see “Buondelmonti, Cristoforo” in DBI, 15:198–200, esp. 199), the first version of the “Liber insularum” was...
merely to give dry accounts of the islands’ history and geography, the author fills his narrative with interesting comments on the island communities, thoughts on the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, opinions on the decline of the Greeks and the power of the Ottomans, and fascinating verbal vignettes and descriptions of historical events such as the capture of the islet of Caloiero off Andros by the Turks. Stories of his own personal experiences are also included; in fact, the narrative is often interrupted by descriptions of the hazards of seafaring and the adventures that befell him in Greek waters, so in some places the book reads like a travelog. Buondelmonti acknowledges no sources apart from a few ancient writers. He probably relied largely on his own firsthand experience and such facts as he could gather from mariners and the local inhabitants. It is most likely that the strictly geographical particulars given in the introductory sections of each chapter, such as the position and dimensions of each island, are drawn from Italian portolan texts.

Buondelmonti’s picture of the Greek islands is sometimes unrecognizable. It is clear from the conformity between the narrative descriptions and the maps that the

written at Rhodes before 1420. It is now lost. The second version, also written at Rhodes, appeared in 1420. A shorter third version was written in Constantinople in 1422, and there was a fourth version written about 1430 containing two additional maps and more information on the historical and mythological background in the narrative. According to Almagià, Campana, and Turner, the shortest version is the earliest: see Roberto Almagià, Monumenta cartographica Vaticana, 4 vols. (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944–55), 1:105–7; A. Campana, “Da codici del Buondelmonti,” in Silloge Bizantina in onore di Silvio Giuseppe Mercati (Rome: Associazione Nazionale per gli Studi Bizanti, 1957), 32–52; and Turner, “Christopher Buondelmonti.” Thoms, on the other hand, contends that the longest version is the closest to the lost original: see Thomas Thoms, “New Information about Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s Drawings of Constantinople,” Byzantion 66 (1996): 431–53. According to Cassi and Dei, “Le esplorazioni vicine,” 212, the long version known in mutilated copies (Vat. Chig. F IV 74 and Marc. Lat X 215) is probably the closest to the lost original. It survives in a complete form only in one copy, in a collection in Switzerland.

21. Giordano Orsini, a scion of an illustrious Roman family with numerous branches in Greece, France, and elsewhere in Europe, was a writer himself and was very interested in geography. In his library he had a great many hand-drawn maps of various parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, several of them bearing the signature “Cristofor,” which has led many scholars to believe that they were by Buondelmonti. See editor van Spitael’s comments in Buondelmonti, “Descriptio insule Crete,” 38.


23. One of the ancient sources mentioned in the text is Ptolemy’s Geography, which Buondelmonti evidently sometimes used as a guidebook for his own travels. When writing about Crete, for example, Buondelmonti finds his way to the remains of Zeus’s tomb by following Ptolemy’s directions. See Buondelmonti, “Descriptio insule Crete,” 208.
cartographer and the narrator were the same person. The sources of the maps in the “Liber insularum” are not acknowledged. The cartography is reminiscent not so much of contemporary portolan charts as of local maps produced in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, though it has been asserted that those maps were themselves based on earlier portolan charts. Be that as it may, there is a clear affinity between Buondelmonti’s maps and Pietro Vesconte’s small-scale maps of Palestine, Paolino Veneto’s regional maps of Italy and the Near East, Marino Sanudo’s regional map of Egypt and Syria, the maps in the margins of the unfinished cosmographic poem La sfera (dated to the early fifteenth century and attributed to Leonardo Dati), and the topographic illustrations to be found in manuscripts of Fazio degli Uberti’s geographical poem “Dittamondo.”

The extant manuscript copies of the “Liber insularum” are dated from 1430 to 1642, with the heaviest concentration in the years 1460–80. These facts can be interpreted in one of two ways: as showing either that a number of the older copies are now lost, as are the original versions of the work, or that there was a surge of public interest after a certain time, especially after the capture of the last Greek territories by the Ottoman Turks. Whatever the truth of the matter, the “Liber insularum” circulated widely and was translated into several other languages, and with it was born a new genre of geographical literature destined to become very popular and to develop in a variety of forms.

**HENRICUS MARTELLUS GERMANUS**

Throughout the fifteenth century, as more and more manuscript copies of the “Liber insularum” were produced, successive improvements were made in the original material. Modern research has brought to light alterations and additions, mostly in the maps, introduced either in order to bring them up to date or to make the book more complete by adding new islands. This practice was entirely acceptable by the standards of the day: further examples are to be found in the manuscript tradition and in the printed editions of Ptolemy’s Geography. Additions to the “Liber insularum” included a larger map of Crete (from Buondelmonti’s “Descripition Cretae”), as a sort of supplement to the original corpus; maps of the large islands of the central Mediterranean or the smaller islands in the Mediterranean; and maps of islands elsewhere in Europe and in Asia and Africa. And so the isolario came to cover an ever-expanding area and led to the work of Henricus Martellus Germanus, who produced a book of islands (Florence, ca. 1480–90) on the pattern established by Buondelmonti, which also included a world map and particulars of many other islands (plate 9), peninsulas, and even seas far beyond Greek waters—not a regional isolario, in fact, but more of a world “island atlas.” The existing copies of Henricus Martellus’s “Isolarii”, which also included a world “island atlas”, are magnificent works. They are made on parchment and use gold and lapis lazuli for their illustrations. The compiler of this beautiful work has obviously made every effort to please and inform, bringing

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24. The maps are in color, and the key to the color code is given in the introduction: green for the sea, brown for the plains, white for the hills and mountains. These are the usual colors of fifteenth-century topographic maps. The fact that Buondelmonti gives the color key is indicative of the limited map literacy of his audience.
25. On the relationship between Marino Sanudo’s regional maps and the chartmaking tradition, see Bouloux, *Culture*, 46–53.
27. On the dating of the extant manuscripts, see Almagià, *Monumenta cartographica Vaticana*, 1:105–17, and Cassi and Dei, “Le esplorazioni vicine,” 223–27. Turner, in “Christopher Buondelmonti,” 215, states that she has located fifty-eight copies of the abridged version and three of the full-length version. She also notes that the heaviest concentration of copies can be found from the years 1460–80.
30. Copies of Henricus Martellus Germanus’ *isolario* exist in the BL (Add. MS. 15760, ff. 75, ca. 1489–90), the Universitätsbibliothek Leiden (Cod. Vossianus Lat. in fol. 23), the library of the Musée Condé at Chantilly (MS. 483), the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (Cod. XXIX, 25), and the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota (see Roberto Almagià, “I mappomondi di Enrico Martello e alcuni concetti geografici di Cristoforo Colombo,” *Bibliofilia* 42 [1940]: 288–311, and Ilaria Luzzana Caraci, “L’opera cartografica di Enrico Martello e la ‘prescoperto’ dell’ America,” *Rivista Geografica Italiana*...
together modern cartographic material drawn from his own sumptuous copies of Ptolemy’s *Geography*.31

The encyclopedic, even antiquarian, aspect of the “*isolario*” is reinforced by the fact that some copies contain lengthy concordances of ancient and modern place-names. Thus, gradually the *isolario* broke free of the early restrictions of regional cartography by covering more or less the whole of the known world. Evidence of the same process is also apparent in the somewhat sketchy anonymous *isolario* of 1500.32

This was a critical turning point in the development of the genre. With the discovery of new sea routes around Africa and the opening up of the Caribbean, the rest of the American continent, and the Pacific archipelagoes, new stretches of coastline and groups of islands came into the Western powers’ sphere of influence, causing the Europeans to perceive the world as an exotic island empire. *Isolarii* were adapted to cater to this perception by being considerably enlarged, some of them so much so that they outgrew the bounds of regional geography and turned into what one might call fragmented, eclectic cosmographies.

**The Golden Age: Venice, Sixteenth Century**

**Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti**

The invention of printing created a broader public for maps, which set new market conditions.33 Italian cities were at the forefront of developments and Venice foremost among them. With a thriving tradition of art and scholarship, an island empire, busy printing houses, and an extensive network of commercial dealings with not only the Mediterranean countries but mainland Europe as well, the Venetian Republic met all the conditions for becoming the strategic center of cartographic developments.34 One of the incunabula from Venice was the first printed collection of maps: an *isolario* of the Aegean islands by Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, which was the nickname of a Venetian shipmaster, so called because his descriptions of the islands were written in sonnet form.35 Bartolommeo’s *isolario* is part of the Italian tradition of treating geographical subjects in verse, the most notable examples of which are Fazio degli Uberti’s “Dittamondo,” Leonardo Dati’s *La Sfera*, and Francesco Berlinghieri’s *Septe giornate della geographia*. First printed around 1485, it contained forty-nine maps (without place-names) printed from woodcut blocks with verse commentaries (fig. 8.2).36

In his introduction, Bartolommeo states that he had been to the Aegean eighteen times in the service of various Venetian noblemen and wrote that “with compass . . . I have stepped repeatedly upon each isle . . . and with a stylus” marked the exact position of every island on the map.37 Up to now, scholars have stressed Bartolommeo’s debt to Buondelmonti, and some have gone so far as to say that his original contribution was slight. That Bartolommeo was indebted to Buondelmonti is undeniable. First and foremost, the conception and form of his work were borrowed from the “*Liber isolarium*”: Bartolommeo’s *isolario* is an atlas of the Aegean islands with

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However, not everything in Bartolommeo’s book was borrowed from his predecessor. Each of the island maps is framed by a compass rose, and some of them (eleven of the forty-nine) have a scale bar in double nautical miles. Reefs and other hazards to navigation are consistently marked with crosses, in accordance with the usual practice for portolan charts. Quite a number of Bartolommeo’s maps give the outlines of the islands more accurately than Buondelmonti’s. Finally, in contrast to Buondelmonti, a humanist with a preference for the ancient place-names and a tendency to go off on mythological digressions, Bartolommeo dalì Sonetti wrote in a racy vernacular, using the popular verse form of the sonnet, and usually gave the place-names current in his own time and new descriptions of the islands.

Although there is a streak of poetry and adventure in Bartolommeo’s writing and his work contains direct references to Dante and Virgil and frequent flights of lyricism, its influence on the evolution of island books was of a different kind to that of Buondelmonti, for his work launched a significant new tradition within the genre: that of the nautical isolario, further examples of which were written throughout the sixteenth century. Bartolommeo’s work inspired Valentim Fernandes’s Portuguese isolario, “De insulis et peregrinatione Lusitanorum,” which dated from 1506–10 and survives in one manuscript copy. This work is confined to the Atlantic islands and contains maps framed by a compass rose. The new isolario is connected with the Portuguese overseas expansion and is thus a departure from the traditional isolarii, which depicted the territory of the Mediterranean islands.

PIRĪ RĪ’ĪS

The next step in the development of isolarii brings us to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Piri Rī’īs, the Turkish admiral and chartmaker from Gallipoli, likewise bypassed the work of the scholarly Buondelmonti and the continuators of the isolario manuscript tradition, relying instead on the more nautical interpretation of Bartolommeo dalì Sonetti. His manuscript book of navigation, the “Kitāb-i bahriye,” represents the Mediterranean isolario at its peak in terms of accuracy and detail. It also marks


copies of the islands and a literary description of each one. Second, the islands are often dealt with in a similar order; the only major difference is that Bartolommeo started with Cerigo and did not cover the other Ionian Islands, which lie off the west coast of Greece. Third, the projection, the manner of drawing the coastline, and the symbols used to mark towns and villages and physical features are very similar. Buondelmonti’s influence is also apparent in the way Bartolommeo dedicated his work through a cryptogram in the first lines of the text.38


39. For example, in his Dantesque description of the ruins of Delos and his frequent speculations on the sexual appetites of island women.

40. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, “Codex Hispanus (Lusitanus)” no. 27. The Atlantic islands are the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, the Cape Verde Islands, and those of the Gulf of Guinea. On Fernandes and his isolario, see Inácio Guerreiro, “Tradição e modernidade nos isolarios ou ‘Livros de Ilhas’ dos séculos XV e XVI,” Oceanos 46 (2001): 28–40, esp. 32–35.
the point at which nautical isolario came to be connected with the public interest, as they supplied the technical information in the Ottoman language needed by professional mariners.

The “Kitāb-i bahriye” survives in two versions. The first, simpler and handier to use, was composed in 1520–21. It contains 131 entries, and twenty-three complete copies of it are still in existence. The second, more of a deluxe edition intended for the use of the imperial court (it is dedicated to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent), was compiled in 1525–26. It contains 219 entries, and ten copies of it survive.41 The “Kitāb,” a work somewhere between a narrative portolan and an isolario, gives minute particulars of the Mediterranean coasts and islands. Its structure is that of the narrative portolan; that is to say it follows the coastal seaways exactly. In its treatment of the material it is closer to the isolario with its detailed mapping of every islet and the nearby shores, frequently in the form of a series of maps at progressively larger scales.

Following the pattern of the narrative portolans, the passages of text in the “Kitāb-i bahriye” give sailing directions and facts about local sailing conditions, safe and dangerous courses to steer, the appearance and landmarks of harbors and landing places, and the facilities offered by each of them for victualing and the replenishment of stores. This practical information is larded with brief digressions on local history and mythology.42

The “Kitāb-i bahriye” is generally acknowledged to be a landmark in the history of sixteenth-century Mediterranean cartography. Its great size (the longer version runs to 850 pages), its wealth of pictorial and factual information, the artistic merit of many of the extant copies, and its exhaustive coverage of the Mediterranean coasts and islands made it unquestionably a splendid specimen of the Ottoman Turks’ answer to Western European achievements in Mediterranean charting during the Renaissance. Perhaps because of the language in which it was written, Piri Reis’s work did not influence the development of the genre in the Christian West, where isolario continued to evolve unaffected by this important contribution from Ottoman hydrography. In the middle of the seventeenth century, with the development of navigational aids, the so-called portolani topographi of Gasparo Tentivo made their appearance in Venice.43 These resembled the “Kitāb-i bahriye” of Piri Reis though they have no direct connection, and they present a detailed cartographic illustration of the narrative portolans.

BENEDETTO BORDONE

The next stage in the evolution of the isolario was a publishing enterprise aimed at broadening the readership: this was the Libro . . . de tutte l’isole del mondo by Benedetto Bordone, which came out in Venice in 1528.44 It covers 111 islands and is in three parts dealing respectively with the islands and peninsulas of the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Far East. An interesting new feature of this book is that it contains small-scale key maps and indexes of an entire region, restoring the relative geographical positions of each of the local maps: there is one map of Europe and one of the northeastern Mediterranean, as well as an oval map of the world attributed to Francesco Rosselli.45

With this work the isolario came of age as a commercially viable genre for large-scale publishing. Bordone did not communicate his own firsthand observations, as Buondelmonti, Bartolommeo, and Piri Reis had done, nor was he even a scholarly studio cartographer making critical recensions of other people’s firsthand reports. He was an astrologist and a man whose life was bound up with books, a manuscript illuminator and traditional blockcutter, born in Padua, who moved to Venice toward the end of the fifteenth century.46 The Libro . . . de tutte l’isole del mondo was a commercial product, and appar-
ently a fairly successful one, judging by the number of editions it went through.47

Of the 111 maps in the book, 62 are of the Greek islands: they are influenced by, and in most cases copied from, Buondelmonti’s and Bartolommeo’s maps, with the rest inspired mainly by the Ptolemaic maps and portolan charts of the early sixteenth century.48 Benedetto addressed his preface to his nephew, Baldassare Bordone, “an excellent surgeon,” which implies that his book was aimed at a wide, non-specialist readership far removed from the world of official geographers, princes, and courtiers. He also states that he had explored the islands he describes when cruising with the Venetian navy, but the truth of the matter appears to be that he never left northeastern Italy. The purpose of the book, by his own account, is twofold: to provide mariners with useful information and to give the public an enjoyable read. This means that his passages of text contain theoretical information on cosmography and geography as well as stories from history and mythology.

Between 1528 and 1571 there was a decline in the output of new printed isolarii; most publishers offered only reissues of the books by Bartolommeo and Bordone. Another work written during this period, but published only after a long delay, was Leandro Alberti’s *Isole appartenenti all’Italia*, a geographical treatise based on the author’s classical studies and his reading of contemporary works (especially those by Flavio Biondo) but also containing a number of eyewitness descriptions.49 It was written before 1553 and first published, without maps, by the Dominican friar Vincenzo da Bologna as an appendix to Alberti’s description of Italy, *Descrittione di tutta l’Italia* (Venice, 1561). The 1568 version, also published in Venice, contained five maps, which were increased to seven in a later edition.

In spite of the relative scarcity of new works during the period 1528–71, it seems that isolarii influenced other related genres, especially the Venetian output of manuscript nautical atlases. Between 1553 and 1564 Battista Agnese’s workshop produced at least five atlases containing a fairly high percentage of maps of islands—not only the bigger islands of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic but also the smaller ones of the Aegean.50

Georgio Sideri (Il Callapoda) also included some island maps in his atlases, though not as many.51 No new printed isolarii were published during this period, and the only known original manuscript work from the period is the important nautical isolario of the world, by the Catalan cosmographer Alonso de Santa Cruz, which was clearly intended as a practical guide to navigation.52 Each of the maps is framed by a compass rose (as were the maps by Bartolommeo and Piri Re’is) and includes a scale bar, and the latitude is marked. In spite of its title (“Isla- rio general de todas las islas del mundo . . .”), the Cat-

lan cosmographer’s guide to the islands covers much more territory than an ordinary isolario: for all intents and purposes it is an early world atlas. Although islands account for most of the material, there are also maps of most of the known parts of the old and new worlds.

**TOMMASO PORCACCHI**

The next new printed isolario was Tommaso Porcacchi’s *L’isole più famose del mondo*, illustrated with maps by

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48. Unlike Buondelmonti and Bartolommeo, Bordone preferred mapping groups of islands near the mainland, his rendering of coastlines is schematic, and the scale is not given on any of his maps—although, following the example of Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, he always marks the points of the compass. In contrast to Bartolommeo, he writes the place-names on his maps; his marking of towns and villages is more simplified.


the engraver Girolamo Porro. This work was the result of a collaboration between the author and a map engraver, a division of responsibility clearly stated in the continuation of the title of the book (descritte da Thomaso Porcacchi da Castiglione Arretino e intagliate da Girolamo Porro Padovano . . .). Porcacchi and Porro’s book was the first isolario to use the technique of copper-plate engraving, which gave the cartographer scope for greater clarity, accuracy, and detail and gradually established itself as the standard medium for illustrations in printed books. However, Porro’s maps are difficult to decipher because of their small size and the excessive amount of information crammed into the limited space. The first edition contained a map of the world and twenty-seven island maps. It was followed by several progressively expanded editions, most of them published after the death of both Porcacchi and Porro, culminating in the edition of 1620, which contained forty-eight maps.

The lengthy text by Porcacchi, cosmographic and encyclopedic in tone, consists of episodes from local history and mythology interspersed with various types of geographical and ethnographic information. Here it should be mentioned that the place-names given on the maps do not always agree with those in the text, as the scholarly Porcacchi preferred the ancient forms whereas Porro used more contemporary names. Porcacchi’s preface is of great interest. In it he explains the theoretical concept of the antiquarian, cosmographic isolario: according to ancient myths (all of which are based on historical fact) and the consensus of opinion among ancient geographers, Europe, Asia, and Africa were once islands, he says, and the whole world is itself an island surrounded by the stream of Oceanus, as Strabo informs us and Pliny concurs. This cosmology is the basis from which Porcacchi starts his own descriptions of the most famous islands, in the conviction that the more and better he writes, the better the world will be known. Let others more educated than himself undertake to describe the world as a whole: he will limit himself to the islands, or rather to certain well-known islands, and try to define the position and give the name of each one; to measure its perimeter and its length and breadth; and to say which other islands lie nearby, what harbors there are, the island’s main products, what sights and other features of interest it has, who its first inhabitants were and who lives there now, what famous persons have come from there, and what towns there are on the island—in short, the history of each island.

Porcacchi’s work also marks an important departure for isolarii. As an anthology of islands, L’isole piv famose del mondo ignores the structural unity of space: geography fragments as history and ethnography move to the fore. In this way Porcacchi opens the genre up for a new type of island book, a topical isolario that, in addition to depicting the island, also reports on the political situation prevailing in the area, with coverage almost exclusively confined to the coast-lands and islands of the eastern Mediterranean (fig. 8.3). This development was connected partly with the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire and partly with the historical evolution of illustrated printed books in the sixteenth century.54

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SMALL-FORMAT, TOPICAL, AND NAUTICAL ISOLARII

Between about 1565 and 1575 a number of small-format composite isolarii appeared, containing pictures of towns and fortresses as well as island maps. These popular publications incorporated material that had been previously published as loose leaves: they all had much in common and often borrowed material from each other, so it is not always easy to identify the unsigned copperplate engravings contained within. One such volume, entitled Isole famose, porti, fortezze, e terre marittime, undated and unsigned, is usually attributed to the printer and publisher Giovanni Francesco Camocio, the publisher of twelve of the eighty-eight numbered prints it contains, although the title page gives Donato Bertelli’s bookshop as the place where it was on sale. Study of the copies in the BL, the BNF, and the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, have shown that the book was published as an anonymous work in successive editions between 1571 and 1574, each edition exhibiting a different set of maps (fig. 8.4). The fullest edition was published by Bertelli and bears the date 1574. It contains eighty-eight numbered maps and plans. A similar compilation of maps, mostly of the Greek islands, was put together by the engraver Simon Pinargenti in 1573, and Bertelli published another compilation of the same kind in 1568 and 1574. These new isolarii differ significantly from their predecessors. First, they were no longer intended for practical use or general edification: instead, they provided topical information about the theaters of the Venetian-Turkish war and the situation prevailing there. Second, the subject matter was different. Among the maps of the islands—which are, incidentally, arranged in random order, to the great confusion of the reader—one finds pictures of fortresses and towns and scenes of fighting between the Christian and Ottoman forces. Third, these

FIG. 8.4. MAP OF CYPRUS FROM GIOVANNI FRANCESCO CAMOCIO’S ISOLARIO, CA. 1570–74. The map depicts the massive military preparations of the Ottomans on the shores of Asia Minor before their onslaught to capture the island in July 1570. This composite edition is one of the many isolarii published during the last decades of the sixteenth century. These works illustrated the armed conflicts arising from the spread of the Ottoman Empire. Although Camocio had only just published a more accurate map of Cyprus in 1566, he preferred in his topical isolario to copy the map of the island by Paolo Forlani (Venice, 1570), which showed the island divided into its eleven medieval districts. The only accompanying text is a brief legend on the map.

Size of the original: 20 × 16 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (Rari Veneti 244 [= 25957], 69).

55. The earliest dated print in the book was done in 1566, the latest in 1574. Twelve of the maps are signed by Camocio; one was engraved by Donato Bertelli, one by Marrino Rota da Sebenico, two by Domenico Zenoi (Zenoni), and four by Paolo Forlani. The other sixty-eight are anonymous. Bertelli acquired Camocio’s copperplates, probably after the latter’s death (thought to have been in 1575): see Rodolfo Gallo, “Gioan Francesco Camocio and His Large Map of Europe,” Imago Mundi 7 (1950): 93–102, esp. 97.

56. This copy, in Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Rari V 244 = 25957), seems to be the most comprehensive of all the known versions: see Gallo, “Gioan Francesco Camocio,” 97–99. Camocio’s isolario was also published by Battista Scalvinoni in Venice, after 1575; see Stylianou and Stylianou, Cartography of Cyprus, 222.

57. Simon Pinargenti, Isole che son da Venetia nella Dalmatia et per tutto l’arcipelago, fino a Costantinopoli, con le loro fortezze, e con le terre più notabili di Dalmatia (Venice: Simon Pinargenti, 1573). Most of the signed maps were engraved by Pinargenti and the rest by Natale Bonifacio and Niccolo Nelli. The copy in the BNF (Ge FF Rés. 9373) contains fifty-one unnumbered maps. The Bertelli compilation is a collection of pictures of towns, typical of the period. Each of the three known copies has a different set of maps, ranging from fifty-one to sixty-eight in number. Gallo (“Gioan Francesco Camocio,” 98–99) records sixty-eight prints in the second edition (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Rari V 422); Ferdinando [Ferando] Bertelli, Civitatum aliquot insigniorum et locorum, magis munitorum . . ., 2d ed. (Venice: Donati Bertelli, 1574). The prints were engraved by Domenico Zenoni (sixteen), Natale Bonifacio (twelve), Ferdinando Bertelli (six), Paolo Forlani (three), Donato Bertelli (two), Felice Brunello (one), and Marrino Rota da Sebenico (one). The work is relevant to the subject of the present chapter because more than half of the prints in the book are maps of islands and coastal places.

58. On the informational functions of the composite isolarii, see George Tolias, “Informazione e celebrazione: Il tramonto degli isolari (1572–1696),” in Navigare e descrivere, 37–43.

59. One such engagement that is invariably illustrated is the sea battle of Lepanto, which was seen by contemporaries as marking the final limit of Turkish expansion to the west. Sometimes two or more maps are devoted to it, showing the scene of the battle, the dispositions of the opposing fleets, and the course of the action. Camocio also has a sheet
isolarii contained only pictorial matter, uninterrupted by any narrative. The only words on Pinargenti’s and Bertelli’s maps are the titles, but Camocio often added a brief note in the title cartouche giving the position and size of the region shown on the map and naming the sovereign power. Finally, there was a noticeable change in the style of the maps. Improvements had been made in the technique of copperplate engraving, and the publishers of these books were among the best engravers of the sixteenth century. Each island was now a self-contained, microscopic landscape framed by its cursorily drawn coastline and depicting wooded hills, valleys, rivers and roads, animals and villages, castles, harbors, ships, and monasteries. Quite often the islands appear to be uninhabited or deserted, but sometimes we see farmworkers, merchants, and laborers going about their business and, most often, troops of soldiers fighting each other or besieging the castles. Everything had its place and was depicted in a clever play of scale and perspective: large objects were reduced in size and small ones were magnified in these maps, where the islands are viewed as if through a microscope.

In the last two decades of the century, several new specimens of the genre appeared. Mention should be made of Francesco Ferretti, whose isolario (1580) contains twenty barely legible charts of the Greek islands; the Florentine Giuseppe Rosaccio, who combined the old style of isolario with the travel literature tradition; and Antonio Millo, the Greek maker of charts and atlases who worked in Venice between 1575 and 1590.60

Antonio Millo’s work takes us back to the isolarii intended solely for practical use. About ten manuscript isolarii written in his hand have survived, dated between 1582 and 1591 (fig. 8.5).61 They generally contain about seventy-five maps and descriptions of Mediterranean islands, which form the bulk of the book in each case, and

Fig. 8.5. Map of Mallorca by Antonio Millo. A characteristic example of the vernacular and nautical isolarii that were current from the end of the sixteenth century onward. These isolarii were confined to the islands of the Mediterranean and were often accompanied by portolan texts or condensed sailing instructions (arte de navigare). These manuscript isolarii continued to be reproduced and used until the middle of the seventeenth century.

Size of the original: 30 × 20 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (MS. It. IV 2 [= 5540], fol. 54r).
in addition Millo often gives descriptions (but not maps) of islands in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The isolario proper is sometimes preceded by a treatise on navigation and sometimes followed by a brief portolan text giving the distances between various islands and other places in the Mediterranean. The point to be stressed is that the material for all Millo’s cartographic work is drawn from sources previously in print. The maps in his isolarii are based on, if not actually copied from, topical maps of the kind published by Camocio, which he reproduced in simplified form. Millo’s isolarii are textbooks for the use of professional seamen and are interesting in that they give us a synoptic view of the average seafarer’s level of technical knowledge in the late sixteenth century. These illustrated books, simpler and easier to understand than Piri Reis’s “Kitāb-i bahriye,” are manuscript practical manuals similar to those produced for so many other trades at that time.

The majority of these nautical isolarii intended for practical use date from the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth. One of the latest of them is now in the library of the Istituto Querini-Stampalia in Venice. Dated 1645, it is the work of a shipowner named Gerolamo Basegio, nicknamed Marafon. It comprises paraphrases of the text of the earlier isolario by Antonio Millo and copies of Millo’s maps.

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, the production of nautical handbooks intended as practical aids to navigation came to be organized on a steadily more systematic basis. The balance was shared equally between mainland coasts and islands, the cartography was more detailed, and the practical isolarii were superseded by more complex navigational manuals, such as the detailed navigational handbooks (the “portolani topograffi”) with charts drawn by Gasparo Tentivo. There is an interesting anonymous seventeenth-century work that, although it possesses all the characteristics of the new genre, is still described in its title as an isolario: it is the “Isolario ossia descrizione delle isole del Mediterraneo,” a lengthy (305 pp.) and detailed portolan. Mediterranean seamen seemed to continue using the nautical isolarii up to the end of the eighteenth century, as we can assume by the late compilation of a similar work, the four-volume manuscript isolario by the Maltese pilot Antonio Borg.

**ANDRÉ THEVET**

One of the works produced in the sixteenth century—the period that saw the most systematic development and widest dissemination of the isolario—is an extreme and utopian example of the genre. It is the unfinished “Grand insulaire” compiled by the French cosmographer André Thevet. The new isolario was exceptional in its conception, for it was intended to cover at least 263 islands in all parts of the world (fig. 8.6).

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62. Querini-Stampalia Manuscript 765: “Isulario de Gerolome Marafon Patron de Nave Per il quale in esso si contiene tutte le isole quanti si ritrova nel Mare Mediterraneo,” fol. 82. The workmanship of this isolario is very shoddy. The text is written in a more uneducated hand than the maps. On folios 21v and 22r the text and maps are reversed, and on folio 28v the map is drawn upside down. The same library has another unfinished isolario by “Girolamo Basegio detto Marafon,” also dated 1645, with text but no maps. This one is written in a more fluent hand. It consists of 112 folios, of which the text of the isolario takes up the first ninety and the remainder contain a brief portolan of the Mediterranean written by a different copyist (Querini-Stampalia Manuscript 162). See Anastasia Stouraiti, *La Grecia nelle raccolte della Fondazione Querini Stampalia* (Venice: Fondazione Scientifiche Querini Stampalia, 2000), 95–97, and also Giuseppe Mazzariol, *Catalogo del fondo cartografico queriniano* (Venice: Lombroso, 1959), 128. An anonymous manuscript isolario of 1645–75 belongs to the tradition inaugurated by Antonio Millo. It bears the title “Isollario del Mediterraneo et colpho di Venezia” and contains thirty-seven maps; see Martayan Lan, *Fine Antique Maps, Atlases & Globes*, catalog 29 (New York: Martayan Lan, 2001).


64. A copy of Antonio Borg’s isolario is in the BL, Add. MS. 13957–13960.

65. “Le grand insulaire et pilotage d’André Thévet Angoumoisin, Cosmographe du Roy, dans lequel sont contenus plusieurs plants d’îles...”
Although the “Grand insulaire” was never finished, Thevet did manage to have plates made of most of the maps at the printing house of Thomas de Leu in Flanders, probably about 1586, before he went bankrupt. These maps, some of which are now in the BNF, some in the Gennadius Library, Athens, and some in the BL, give us a good idea of the breadth of conception and the quality of the work. Great care was taken with the artwork, and the text supplies a mass of miscellaneous information. Not all of this is reliable, but even the items that are mere fantasy represent beliefs that were deeply rooted in the sixteenth century.

Thevet, the cosmographer to the last kings of the House of Valois, had already written about the islands in his first book, Cosmographie du Levant, an interesting work that combined fantasy and mythology with fact. Toward the end of his career, the cosmographer returned to the edifying world of insular quirks and mythological flights of fancy (descriptions of demons, giants, and monsters) that were staples of seafarers’ tales. For this he incurred the disapproval of his fellow scholars; Jacques-August de Thou castigated him for dealing in books “which are in the hands of the populace,” while Nicolas Claud Fabri de Peiresc criticized him for having his maps drawn capriciously by persons whose reliability was suspect.

Thevet’s ambitious idea of gathering hundreds of islands in a single book may seem unrealistic to us today, but it does make for an interesting synthesis of contrasting elements. On the one hand is the tradition of the old cosmographic model with its moralistic allegories, its piecemeal approach, and its popular mode of expression. And then there is the new trend, characterized by scholarly composition and a predilection for an image of geographical space tested by the intellect. The impasse facing the compiler of the “Grand insulaire” on the threshold of the seventeenth century highlighted the need for change.

In spite of Porcacchi’s and Thevet’s efforts to extend to the maximum the geographical horizon of their works, humanist scholars were still interested in the specific island groups. In 1591 David Chytraeus, a German Lutheran and historian, published a description of the Baltic Islands. It is not certain whether this work contains maps or whether it follows the pattern of a regional isolario, such as the one by Leandro Alberti; I have been unable to examine a copy.

A Second Heyday: The Low Countries and Venice, Seventeenth Century

Even after world atlases had made their appearance, the isolarii, those fragmented island cosmographies, maintained their momentum and retained their readership. In 1601 Jean Matal published a synoptic world isolario in Cologne, with composite maps of numerous islands. In 1610 Agidius Sadeler reissued Rosaccio’s Viaggio without any textual matter, while Porcacchi and Porro’s L’isole più famose del mondo established itself as a “best-seller” of its time, going through several new and expanded editions.


68. Quoted in Lestringant, L’atelier du cosmographe, 154.


70. Jean Matal, Insularium orbis aliquot insularum, tabulis aeneis delineatum continens (Cologne: Ioannes Christophori, 1601).

like those of Antonio Millo, were based on printed isolario of the late sixteenth century. Yet the book is not without interest, because it foreshadowed certain changes in the manner of composition and the nature of the material. It carried on the old tradition of encyclopedic and antiquarian isolario, but in both the text and the illustrations more space is given to notable or memorable images, especially the archaeological and ethnological. Six of the fifty-one illustrations are of historic monuments and traditional women’s costumes worn on the islands of Chios, Melos, and Naxos. To that extent, Lupazolo’s book heralds the educational tours of Greece and the islands that came into vogue in the late seventeenth century. From the two surviving copies of his isolario we can assume that the work was offered as an illustrated guide to the western travelers Lupazolo was hosting as the Venetian consul in the islands. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that parts of his isolario are included in Jean de Thévenot’s Relation d’un voyage fait au Levant . . . (Paris, 1664).72

The isolario published in the seventeenth century also returned to their geographical roots, that is, to the Aegean and the great islands of the eastern Mediterranean, Crete, and Cyprus. In the second half of the century, presses in both Flanders and Venice produced new isolario of the Greek islands. As before, developments were influenced by the historical situation. Commerce in the Levant was at its zenith. The French and Italians, who had pioneered trade in the eastern Mediterranean, were now facing competition from Dutch trading houses, which claimed the lion’s share. Meanwhile, the final phase of the long-running Venetian-Turkish conflict was being played out, with the Venetians losing Crete and temporarily recapturing the Peloponnesus. Once again the attention of Western Europe was turned toward the Greek East. Descriptive and illustrated books were published in considerable numbers, and geographical or topical publications on Greece enjoyed a renewed spell of popularity.73

The revival of the isolario tradition was due mainly to the contemporary mania for collecting. Marco Boschi, the great Venetian engraver, art lover, and dealer in curios and works of art, drew public attention back to the old island encyclopedias.74 Among other cartographic works, he compiled and published an isolario of the Aegean (1658), an elegant example of mid-seventeenth-century Venetian printmaking that contains maps of forty-eight islands and a general map of the Aegean.75

Although the source of Boschi’s first Greek topographical book is known, the sources used for his isolario remain unidentified.76 In any event, his maps (or the originals on which they were modeled) were used as the basis for another cosmographical compilation about the Aegean, the isolario of Francesco Piacenza of Naples.77 The latter contains sixty-two maps and descriptions of Aegean islands, Crete, and Cyprus. The distinctive feature of this work is that the descriptions of the islands are exceptionally long, totaling some seven hundred pages, which makes this work a kind of isolario panedict. The text takes us back to the early cosmographic works of the sixteenth century, while the maps, drawn in a variety of projections, are outstanding illustrations of Italian engraving that make the most of the potential of separate miniature islandscapes.

72. See Fassoulakis, “Lupazolo,” 502. For the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travelers to Greece, see David Constantine, Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). One of the most notable of those travelers was the French naturalist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, who actually met Lupazolo at Smyrna in 1702. According to Tournefort, Lupazolo was then said to be 118 years old, yet he was still serving as the Venetian consul there. See Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, Relation d’un voyage du Levant fait par ordre du Roi . . . , 3 vols. (Lyons: Anisson et Posuel, 1717), 2:133. Lupazolo was actually 115 years old. Francesco Lupazolo (or Lupazzoli, meaning literally “lone wolf”) was born at Casale Monferrato in 1587 and served as consul of Venice at Smyrna between 1669 and 1702. On this exceptional longevity and his productive character, see Sonia P. Anderson, An English Consul in Turkey: Paul Rycaut at Smyrna, 1667–1678 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 50–52.

73. See, for example, Jacob Enderlin’s Archipelagus Turbatus (1686) and his description of Macedonia and Thrace (1689); P. A. Pacifico’s description of Morea (1686) and Negroponte (1694); N. N.’s (Niccolò Nelli’s?) description of Negroponte (1687); Albizzi’s description of Chios (1694), and the volumes by Vincenzo Coronelli on various Greek territories.


75. Marco Boschi, L’archipelago con tutte le Isole, Scogli Secche, e Bassi Fondi . . . (Venice: F. Nicolini, 1658). His other cartographic works include an atlas of Crete, Il regno tutto di Candia, delineato a parte, a parte et intagliato da Marco Boschi Venetiano. Al Serenissimo Prencipe e Regal Collegio di Venetia (an erroneously suggested first edition of 1643 does not exist; the only edition extant was published in Venice in 1651), maps of Dalmatia and Albania (now lost), and a map of the Territorio Vicentino.

76. Marco Boschi’s Il regno tutto di Candia is a printed version of a manuscript atlas by Marco Boschi Basilicata, a military engineer responsible for the fortifications on Crete during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Five manuscript atlases by his hand survive: Museo Correr, Portolani 4 (1618); BL, Maps, K. Top 113, 104, tab. 6 (1612); Historical Museum of Crete (1614–26); Biblioteca Comunale dell’ Archiginnasio, Bologna, MS. A 2849 (1638); and Gennadius Library, Athens, GT 290.

77. Francesco Piacenza, L’egeo redivivo ò sia choroarchia del l’archipelago . . . (Modena: E. Soliani, 1688).
Fig. 8.7. THE ISLET OF KALOGEROS FROM THE NORTH AND SOUTH SIDES BY CORONELLI. The *Isolario dell’Atlante Veneto* (1696), whose two large volumes represented the swan song of the genre with over three hundred maps and views of islands and littoral regions from all the world, was a monumental composition of limited originality. With this double-view map of Calojero (Kalogeros), Coronelli attempted an exhaustive depiction of a self-contained island microcosm. In order to achieve this optical effect, the Venetian cosmographer used two different maps from André Thevet’s *isolario*: the map of Kalogeros of Andros (“Caloiero d’Andros dit le bon vieillant,” “Grand insulaire,” vol. 2, fol. 90bis) for the north view, and that of Kalogeros of Nisyros (“Le Caloiero de Nisaro dit Panagea,” “Grand insulaire,” vol. 2, fol. 56 bis) for the south. And see figures 47.7 and 47.8. Size of each drawing: ca. 12.5 × 16.5 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (285.c.17, fol. 280v [= p. 280]).
A wide range of sources, including Boschini’s work, was used for the composite isolario compiled by the Dutch engraver and publisher Olfert Dapper (1688). This was an interesting publishing venture in that it was the first isolario produced in Flanders. It contains a wealth of cartographic material, views of towns, plans of fortresses, and pictures of local costumes. The format is unusually large, and the typography of a high standard. Here the old model was modernized, and the isolario was on the way to becoming a regional atlas, full of geographical, economic, and ethnographic facts. Dapper’s work was evidently a commercial success, judging from the fact that the French translation of it ran to two editions, both published in Amsterdam (1703). Flemish presses also produced books by the Peeters family, which were not unlike isolarii. They were cheap, small-sized composite atlases intended for a less demanding mass readership.

With the last isolarii we come to the works of Vincenzo Coronelli, which are among the finest of their kind. Coronelli’s work presents the researcher with problems aplenty, because the output of his workshop was quite extensive but not very systematically planned. Moreover, Coronelli was in the habit of compiling supposedly new atlases by mixing, rearranging, adding, and excising material by whim.

The whole of Coronelli’s output was gathered together in the Atlante Veneto, whose thirteen volumes include three isolarii. The first of these, Isole, città, et fortezze (1689), a two-volume composite atlas in the tradition started by Italian publishers in the sixteenth century and revived by Olfert Dapper, is a collection of maps and pictorial views compiled mainly with commercial considerations in mind. In the second, entitled Mediterraneo, Coronelli reverts to the historical-topical type of isolario, prompted this time by recent developments in the Venetian-Turkish conflict. Published in two volumes, one on the Aegean islands and the other on Crete and Cyprus, it contains 103 prints, of which seventy-five are maps and views of the Aegean islands, while the rest are illustrations of battles, monuments, and local costumes. Like Dapper’s work, it was influenced by the subject matter and illustrations of the flourishing contemporary travel literature.

The third of Coronelli’s isolarii, the two-volume Isolario dell’Atlante Veneto (1696), is a monumental collection of maps and views of islands, marks one last return to the universal isolario (fig. 8.7). In the introduction, Coronelli describes his book as an essential supplement to Joan Blaeu’s atlas and harkens back to the methodology of the compilers of sixteenth-century isolarii, declaring: “We do not know the exact number of islands.” However, he goes on, “the whole world is divided into islands, starting with the four continents, which might be described as large islands, and ending with islands so small that they do not deserve the name and are called rocky islets.”

The title claims that Coronelli’s isolario contains 310 maps and illustrations, but the number varied from copy to copy. With respect to his sources, Coronelli mentions ninety-six ancient and modern geographers, including Olfert Dapper, Allain Manesson-Mallet, Benedetto Bordon, and Tommaso Porcacchi.

**Function and Uses of the Isolarii**

Coronelli’s work brings us to the end of the age of the isolario, although some of the cheaper examples continued to be published in the early decades of the eighteenth cen-

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78. Olfert Dapper, *Nauweurige beschryving der eilanden in, de Archipel der Middelantsche Zee . . .* (Amsterdam, 1688).


82. See Armao, *Vincenzo Coronelli*, 166–69.


84. The copy in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (285.c.17–18), which is one of the most complete, has 359 maps and illustrations.

tury. For three hundred years isolarii had been largely Mediterranean, a sort of local cartographic specialty.

The compilers of isolarii were Mediterranean people, and many of them—mostly Italians from Florence, Venice, and Genoa, but also Ottomans, Spaniards, Greeks, and Frenchmen, and even Portuguese—had firsthand experience of the islands. All of them had some sort of connection with the islands: Piri Reis, Antonio Millo, Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti, and Francesco Ferretti were local mariners; Francesco Lupazolo spent his long life in Chios and Smyrna; Cristoforo Buondelmonti, a Florentine, spent most of his life on Rhodes and died there; André Thevet and Girolamo Marafon were familiar with the region from their visits; the Venetian engravers and cartographers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were citizens of a republic that possessed more territory in the Greek East than in the Italian peninsula. The Florentine Henricus Martellus Germanus was expressing a widely held view when he stated in his excellent work that the early isolarii were descriptions of the islands of “our Mediterranean” or “our sea,” echoing the ancient Romans’ mare nostrum.86

The isolario was a particular genre that came into being during the gradual widening of the geographical horizons due to the European expansion toward east and west, combined with developments in the learned approach by which empirical inspection steadily gained ground.87 Although this was not always the case, the importance of primary experience was acknowledged by most compilers of isolarii, who emphasized in their prefaces that everything written in their books was the fruit of systematic personal observations. These works reflect the meeting between an old and a new tendency: on the one hand the growing interest of the learned in material reality, on the other the underground perpetuation of moralistic cosmography with its allegorical approach, its mnemonic clichés, and its popular dimension. The miniature worlds of the islands, which the isolarii set out to describe as self-contained universes, each with its own mythology, history, and geography, are in fact the best places for the application of this dualism. As Jacob remarks, “The island is not an anodyne space.”88 An island map presents to our view one of the smallest units of space, a unit that is visible all at once: this is cartographic readability at its maximum. One might add that an analytical narrative description of an island is a cosmographic minimum. Isolarii, with their peculiar hybrid character, reflected the vacillations and tergiversations of the process of change and presented a world fragmented into unconnected yet controlled localities.89

Some isolarii suggested solutions to the problems of arranging the overall cartographic representation of the known world. They could be called early world atlases that, unable to describe the universe methodically, con-

88. Jacob, L’empire des cartes, 366.
89. See Lestringant, L’atelier du cosmographe, 189–92. Tom Conley, in his interesting and original book The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 167–201, sets out to prove that “the way that cosmography fails to explain the world gives rise to a productive fragmentation that momentarily allows various shapes of difference to be registered without yet being appropriated or allegorized” (p. 169).
92. On the relations between isolarii and geographical thinking and on the movement of ideas during the Renaissance, see Jacob, L’empire des cartes, 197–201, 361–83, and Conley, Self-Made Map, esp. 167–201.
riphery of geographical literature as their authors concentrated more and more on general knowledge or news about the current political situation. As a result, *isolarii* developed into brief, unsophisticated, and visually homogeneous “popular” geographical texts that drifted ever further from the realm of formal geography. It is highly significant that established geographers and cartographers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries consistently steered clear of *isolarii*.94

There is nothing particularly remarkable about the conception of the *isolario* as a genre, for the practice of organizing knowledge into thematic compartments is widely found in medieval and Renaissance learned literature. Lengthy lists in chronicles, books of wisdom, bestiaries, books of miracles, and later, collections of views of towns, harbors, costumes, battles, or military formations had accustomed people to the thematic encyclopedic approach.95

*Isolarii* show close affinities with other illustrated books of that period: they conform to the same standards as the illustrated popular encyclopedic works intended for a mass readership, as they are themselves illustrated thematic collections. This tendency, a characteristic feature of the Renaissance ethos of curiosity, is reinforced by the fact that not a few compilers of *isolarii* also published other encyclopedic works, which were usually illustrated: the founding father of the genre, Buondelmonti, wrote *Nomina virorum illustrum*, Bertelli some illustrated encyclopedic works about costumes and collections of views of towns, Porcacchi a peculiar sort of dictionary dealing with the history of funerary rites, Franco an illustrated book of Venetian costumes, Thetvet his famous book of historical portraits, and Boschini several books about precious stones and *objets d’art*, including one that he called an “*isolario* of painters,” an eccentric manual of navigation containing biographies of contemporary artists.96 Even Antonio Millo, a Greek pilot with little formal education, drew an illustrated collection of the antiquities of Rome.97

The terminology used by compilers of *isolarii* to describe the maps in their works is variable and irregular, revealing the fluid character of early cartographic terminology and also the degree of marginality of the genre. This is most apparent in the early works. Buondelmonti sees his maps as illustrations to the text, and so does Henricus Martellus the island maps in his work, although he uses a more sophisticated terminology to define the rest of the cartographic material in his *isolario* (e.g., *mappa-mundi* for the universal Ptolemaic map). The anonymous compiler of 1500 characterized the island sketches as choral graphics.

The terms prevailing for the *isolario* maps during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are expressions related to the printed illustrations (“intaglios” and “tabulae aeneae”). Rosaccio defines his maps as “disegni de geografia e corografia” (drawings of geography and chorography). In the work of Thetvet and Piacenza we can discern a tendency to see the *isolorio*’s illustrations as part of the cartographic material. Thetvet names his island maps “plans,” Piacenza “piante.” Only Coronelli, at the end of the seventeenth century, describes his *isolario* maps as “tavole geografiche.”

The compilers of *isolarii* came from a variety of professions. The only two professional marine cartographers, in the sense in which that term was used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were Pirī Re’is and Antonio Millo. Four were cosmographers, if we include Piacenza (primarily a lawyer, but he occasionally taught geography) with Santa Cruz, Thetvet, and Coronelli. Humanist scholars and antiquarian writers also accounted for a fair proportion of the compilers, but are outnumbered by miniaturists, engravers, publishers, and others engaged in the book trade.

Classified according to their predominant character, *isolarii* can be divided into three main groups: the nautical, the antiquarian-humanistic, and the topical (fig. 8.8). However, elements of all three can be found, to a greater or lesser extent, in every *isolario*. The predominantly nautical group is smaller than either of the others. Most of the works of this type deal only with the Mediterranean islands; often they are in manuscript form and were intended primarily as basic navigation manuals for

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94. On the hostile reaction of contemporary scholars to Thetvet’s “Grand insulaire,” see p. 1474.
97. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS, It. V 52012. Millo’s antiquarian drawings are prefixed to a somewhat sketchy *isolario*, with no accompanying text.
Mariners. Humanistic isolarii, whether manuscript or printed, are the most numerous. Sometimes they cover only the Greek islands, sometimes the islands of the Mediterranean, and sometimes the islands of the world. Compiled for edifying and encyclopedic purposes, they were intended for leisure reading and digress into long discussions on mythology and local sights and curiosities. The historical-topical isolarii, however, contain few if any comments, and they dealt exclusively with the periods and theaters of important military campaigns in the Mediterranean, notably the Battle of Lepanto (1571) and the fall of Cyprus (1573) or the fall of Candia and the Venetian possession of Peloponnese (1648–1715), and they reflected the hopes and anxieties of the Christian world.

Isolarii also show points of similarity in their material aspect. Most manuscript copies of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cosmographic isolarii were written on paper, and their maps were not usually drawn by skilled miniaturists; presumably their readers were educated men who were unwilling to pay for a high-class illuminated parchment. However, there are some that were obviously intended for more demanding collectors.
Most manuscript and printed isolarii, except those produced in the last phase, differ in format from the academic books published in folio, which were read on a reading desk or large bookstand, and also from most humanist books, which were in quarto format for use in libraries.\(^98\) Isolarii were usually published in a small, handy format, which is one reason for concluding that they were intended for a wide reading public and a variety of uses.

Henricus Martellus’s “Insularium” was intended for a demanding clientele of princely collectors and thus has to be considered as one more advance of humanism into the realm of power. The “Insularium” supplied the princes with encyclopedic information on the world—its present and its history and curiosities. Some of the nautical isolarii were also aimed at discriminating collectors. The “Kitâb-i bâhiye” was available in two versions, one more accessible and another more luxurious. Antonio Millo’s isolarii, though often dedicated to holders of high rank, were always written on paper and contained only rudimentary ornamentation. In contrast, Bartolommeo dalli Sonetti’s book was republished in a larger format, and several manuscript copies of it were made on paper or parchment.\(^99\) The attractive isolarii of the later period, including those by Boschini, Dapper, and Coronelli, were aimed at a more discriminating and educated public, yet their content followed the same basic guidelines. In this last phase a more sophisticated general public had had their curiosity aroused by the numerous travel books they had read, and they thirsted for ever more illustrations and more ethnological and anthropological facts. The resulting change in the late isolarii, where the antiquarian approach gradually opens to information and the new observational sciences, is quite noticeable.

The titles of isolarii are long and detailed, usually giving a summary of their contents like that of an advertisement for goods being offered for sale. The authors’ or publishers’ dedications on the title page or in prefaces were often addressed to the compilers’ actual or would-be patrons—generally high-ranking ecclesiastical or civic dignitaries or military officers—and sometimes to their friends and acquaintances or even the anonymous reader. Isolarii were presented by their authors as works to be read at leisure, of interest to mariners, geographers, merchants, and anybody else with an inquiring mind. Certainly the information provided by most isolarii, other than those that were practical manuals of navigation, was best suited to nonspecialized readers eager for geographical facts and fascinated by tales of adventure and descriptions of marvels and wonders. As early as 1420, Buondelmonti dedicated his “Liber insularum” to Cardinal Orsini, the first named armchair traveler.

However, the poor quality of the information and the total absence of descriptive passages in some isolarii, especially the early topical ones, suggests that they were addressed to a broader spectrum of nonspecialized readers, from the humanist scholar interested in the geographical settings of ancient mythology and history to the user with limited education and even the illiterate; readers from all walks of life who wanted easily accessible information, mainly in pictures (and sometimes only in pictures, with no text at all) about the wonders of the ancient and modern world, the latest discoveries, and the backstage intrigues of the confrontation between the Ottoman East and the Christian West; readers whose interest was aroused by the prevailing culture of curiosity and who wanted to equip themselves, as far as their purse and their education allowed, with the geographical background knowledge considered necessary at the time.

This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the compilers of isolarii often seem to have been unbothered by the quality of their material. Accurate delineation of the islands was not always a prime concern of the cartographers. Quite a number of isolarii are characterized by an extraordinarily slapdash approach to the selection of material, sometimes apparently deliberately. Engravers such as Bertelli and Camocio, both of whom had shown that they could draw island maps that set new standards of precision and excellence, chose to include in their isolarii more simplified and sometimes downright inaccurate maps with which the public was familiar.

The appearance of the first world atlases toward the end of the sixteenth century did not spell the end of the isolarii; in fact they enjoyed a second heyday in the seventeenth century, in spite of the dominance of atlases. The reason for this was that isolarii, those “outdated and spurious mutations of cosmography,”\(^100\) had never competed

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99. For instance, MS. 17.874 (7397) of the Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels (see Wouter Bracke, “Une note sur l’Isolario de Bartolomeo da li Sonetti dans le manuscrit de Bruxelles, BR, CP, 17874 [7379],” Imago Mundi 53 [2001]: 125–29); MS. ital. IX 188 (= 6286) of the Marciana, which follows a different order for the islands; or the manuscript conserved in National Maritime Museum, London, 9920. Bartolommeo’s isolario in the BNF (Cartes et Plans, Ge DD 1989) is not a manuscript but a painted, colored copy of the work. See Tolias, Greek Portolan Charts, 192–96: Millo’s isolario of about 1580 is dedicated to Vincenzo Morosini, procurator di Santo Marco, that of 1582 to Sforza Pallavicino, Marchese di Corte Magiore et Generale dell’Illustissima Signoria di Venetia, and his 1591 work to Giovanni Bembo, provveditore di armada. The 1582 copy of the work, the earliest dated one, is now in the Sylvia Ioannou Collection in Athens. See the catalog by Artemis Skoutare, ed., Πλευκεία χώρα Κύπρους: Η ευρωπαϊκή χαρτογραφία της Κύπρου (15ος–19ος αιώνας), από τη σελλαγή της Σύλβας Ιωάννη = Sweet Land of Cyprus: The European Cartography of Cyprus (15th–19th Century) from the Sylvia Ioannou Collection (Athens: AdVenture A. E., 2003), 172–73.

100. Lestringant, L’atelier du cosmographe, 159.
with formal geography and cartography, and consequently they were not radically affected by the tendency toward order and scale.\(^{101}\) Indeed, early printed atlases incorporated some features borrowed from their less systematic predecessors. Both Ortelius and Mercator published mosaic maps that included island maps lifted straight out of *isolarii*. Material taken from *isolarii* was also used in many geographical, historical, and travel books of the period.\(^{102}\)

By the eighteenth century the main centers for the production of *isolarii* had gone into an irreversible decline. Florence had long since lost its strategic role in this connection, and Venice, the second most important center, had been eased to the sidelines. *Isolarii* were a thing of the past, though the various needs they had served in their own peculiar way still existed.

For the successors to the *isolario* we must look to nautical manuals and travel books. The navigation manuals called pilots, which made their appearance in the mid-seventeenth century, provided more systematic and analytical guidance on the practicalities of seafaring, while the mounting tide of travel literature more than covered the encyclopedic offerings of the *isolarii*. Until the end of the eighteenth century, travel in the eastern Mediterranean—and also in Asia and the Americas—was limited to the familiar coastal areas and islands. Travelers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries proved to be the truest heirs to the island cosmographers, composing a profusion of illustrated books intended for the reader’s enjoyment and edification that offered a mass of modern cosmographical information dealing with mythology, history, natural history, and ethnography.

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101. In fact, Henricus Martellus and Bordone made considerable use of the Ptolemaic cartography of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, borrowing material for their *isolarii*.

102. To mention only the instances relevant to Greece, Ortelius included in his *Theatrum orbis terrarum* three composite maps: *Insularum aliquot maris Mediterranei descriptio* (1570), *Archipelagi insularum aliquot descrip.* (1584), and *Insular. aliquot Aegei Maris antiqua descript.* (1584), while Mercator included two in his *Atlas sive Cosmographicae meditationes*: “Candia cum insulis aliquot circa Graeciam” (Crete, with inset maps of Corfu, Zante, Melos, Naxos, Thíra, and Karpathos) and “Cyprus ins.” (Cyprus, with inset maps of Lemnos, Chios, Lesbos, Euboea, Cerigo, and Rhodes).