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ISLANDS OF THE AEGEAN. PAGES IN A SEA OF PAPER. FROM APOLLO TO THE INFIDEL TURK, BUONDELMONTI'S GEOPOLITICAL ARCHIPELAGO

Riassunto

Nel presente contributo continuo ad indagare il mare come spazio letterario in termini geocritici, nelle relazioni dinamiche tra spazio, mappe, luoghi e letteratura. Mi concentro su come le isole funzionino metaforicamente come pagine su cui scrivere, in un mare che è come un libro. Sostengo che, come solcando la carta con una barca che è la penna, gli autori scrivono lo spazio insulare del Mar Egeo, uno degli spazi letterari privilegiati del Mediterraneo. Partendo dal *De montibus* e dalla *Genealogia deorum gentilium* di Boccaccio, dal *De insulis et earum proprietatibus* (1385 ca.) di Domenico Silvestri e dal *Liber insularum Arcipelagi* (1420) di Cristoforo Buondelmonti, il saggio indaga lo spazio insulare attraverso la connessione tra poesia e geografia. L'obiettivo è quello di esaminare le modalità di rappresentazione e gli effetti delle isole e, in ultima analisi, di mostrare l'impatto delle isole "scritte". Per Buondelmonti, all'indomani della caduta di Costantinopoli nel 1453, le isole dell'Egeo divennero le pagine su cui costruire artisticamente l'Altro, lo spazio letterario dell'alterità. Passando da un'isola all'altra, da Boccaccio a Silvestri e Buondelmonti, cerco di condividere i vantaggi di una lettura geocritica delle isole e di sondare gli effetti geopolitici e ambientali degli Isolarii del Rinascimento.

Parole chiave: Isolarii, Mar Egeo, mitologia, geocritica, geopolitica

Abstract

In this paper I continue to approach the sea as a literary space in geocritical terms in the dynamic relationships between space, maps, place and literature. I focus on how islands function metaphorically as pages on which to write, in a sea that is like a book. I argue that, as with ploughing the paper with a boat that is the pen, authors write the insular space of the Aegean Sea, one of the privileged literary spaces of the Mediterranean. Starting with Boccaccio's *De montibus* and *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, Domenico Silvestri's *De insulis et earum proprietatibus* (1385 ca.) and Cristoforo Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum Arcipelagi* (1420), the essay investigates insular space through the connection between poetry and geography. Its goal is to examine the modes of representation and effects of islands and ultimately to show the impact of 'written' islands. For Buondelmonti, in the wake of the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, the islands of the Aegean became the pages on which to artistically construct the Other, the literary space of Otherness. Passing from island to island, from Boccaccio to Silvestri and Buondelmonti, I attempt to share the advantages of reading islands geocritically and to probe the geopolitical and environmental effects of Island Books.

Keywords: Island Books, Aegean Sea, mythology, geocricitism, geopolitics

It is not down in any map; true places never are.
(Melville, *Moby Dick)*

Appare, a volte, avvolta di foschia, magica e bella
Ma se il pilota avanza, su mari misteriosi
È già volata via
Tingendosi d'azzurro, color di lontananza
(Francesco Guccini, *L'isola non trovata*).

«And so, the love of islands has always, for me, been inextricable from the love of maps. Cartographers know that to isolate and distil the features of a portion of the earth's surface, in all its inexpressible complexity, is to exert power over it. To transfer that distillation onto paper is in some way to encompass it. But it could be said that maps offer only the illusion of understanding a landscape»[1].

Encompass, from Latin, *in*, meaning to make or put in, and *compass*, to surround, contain, envelop, enclose, with steps (*com-passare*). Perhaps island maps, reined in by their coasts, are a special case. They invite the viewer to indulge the imagination, to walk along a dreamed perimeter. This paper deals with islands and literary cartography, that is islands, maps, and writing, aware that, as in Francesco Guccini's song *L'isola Non Trovata* (*The Island Not Found*)[2], inspired by Gozzano's poem *La più bella* (*The most beautiful*, 1913), the most beautiful island is «that island that is already gone, towards mysterious seas. It has already flown away turned blue, the colour of the distance»[3].

Inspired by what Gavin Francis writes in his *Island dreams*, the focus is on representations of islands in terms of geocriticism that observes from close the dynamic relations among space, place, and literature. In this perspective, examining a number of texts from the 12th to the 15th century, islands turn out to be literary spaces namely pages of the sea-

[1] G. Francis, *Island dreams. Mapping an obsession*, Edinburgh, Canongate books, 2020, trad.it. *Cartografia di un sogno,* 2021, p. 5.

[2] F. Guccini, *La più bella*, in *La Voce del padrone*, EMI Italiana SpA, 1970.

[3] «Appare a volte avvolta di foschia, magica e bella, / ma se il pilota avanza, su mari misteriosi è già volata via, / tingendosi d'azzurro, color di lontananza», in Guccini, *L'isola non trovata*, cit.

book, with the pen that shapes «their fluctuant perimeter in some ways to encompass it »[4], and in some ways to exert power over it.

In anticipation of a volume called *A sea of paper. Mapping islands in a Mediterranocentric sea. From Boccaccio to Bordone's New World,* the theme of 2023 special issue of Annali, *Spazi letterari del Medioevo*, lends itself to expand the geocritical approach of the Mediterranean to also include insular spaces. It continues the efforts of *Il mare salato* (2020) and *Rotte di poesia* (2021)[5], to experiment new tools for a geo-philology of the sea[6].

The anonymous writer who translated Cristoforo Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum Arcipelagi* (1420 ca.-1430)[7] from Latin into Italian, says that the only goal of his navigation was to investigate the effects of the islands («lo fine del mio navigare solo era poter investigare l'effetto delle isole» in ms. Ross 704, BAV, Rome)[8]. In the footsteps of Jean Marie Grassin, Bertrand Westphal and Robert T. Tally Jr.[9], my goal is to explore the spatial practices in representations of insular spaces, the changes in modes of representation, and the «effects of the islands».

1. Mobile islands, literary cartographies: statement of the problem

A medieval map of the Mediterranean in the cosmographical treatise *Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes* (ms. Arab. C. 90, fols. 30b and 31a, Bodleian Library, London, late 12th – early 13th

[4] G. Francis, *op. cit*., p. 5.

[5] R. Morosini, *Il mare salato. Il Mediterraneo di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio,* Roma, Viella, 2020 and *Rotte di poesia, rotte di civiltà. Il Mediterraneo degli dei nella Genealogia di Boccaccio e di Piero di Cosimo*, Roma, Castelvecchi, 2021.

[6] R. Morosini, *For a Geo-Philology of the Sea. Writing Cartography, Mapping the Mediterranean mare historiarum, from Dante to Renaissance Islands books*, in A. Fabris, A. Göschl, S. Schneider (eds.) *Sea of Literatures. Towards a Theory of Mediterranean Literature*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2023, pp. 192-227.

[7] C. Buondelmonti, *Description of the Aegean and Other Islands*, Evelyn Edson (translation and edition by), New York, Italica Press, 2018. This edition is Henricus Martellus' copy of Crstoforo Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum*. All citations are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

[8] This manuscript dates to the years 1430-1470, with passages added to Buondelmonti's *Liber.* See more in P. Pontari, *Il ms. Vat. Ross. 704 e il "Liber insularum Arcipelagi" di Cristoforo Buondelmonti: interpolazioni di un anonimo volgarizzatore anconetano*, in «Itineraria», 12, 2013, pp. 83-172.

[9] B. Westphal, *La Géocritique. Réel, fiction, espace*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2007; B. Westphal, *The Plausible World. A Geocritical Approach to Space, Place, and Maps*, London, Palgrave MacMillian, 2013; R. T. Tally Jr., *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, London, Palgrave McMillan, 2011.

century)[10] compiled anonymously between 1020 and 1050 AD, possibly in Fatimid Egypt, shows the Western (from the Strait of Gibraltar on the left, indicated by the red line), and the Eastern Mediterranean constellated by islands: those on the Western Mediterranean are noted simply as *jazirah* (island), while those in the Eastern Mediterranean are more detailed. Sicily and Cyprus are represented as large rectangles [**Fig. 1**][11].

In his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (*Genealogy of the Pagan Gods),* Boccaccio also notes the presence in the Mediterranean of a thousand islands («The most ancient men believed that the Mediterranean Sea, bounded by the African, Asian and European shores, *notable for a thousand islands*, was brought down to our lands from the Ocean», Preface I x).

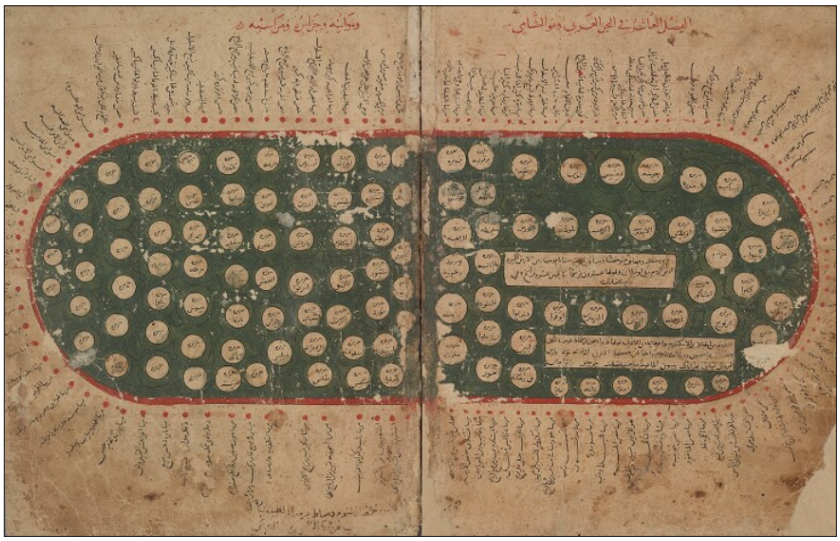

Fig. 1. *The Mediterranean, a sea of Islands, in Book of Curiosities, MS. Arab. c. 90, fols. 30b and 31a., Bodleian Library, 11 th Century (?)*

[10] The map has been edited and translated by E. Savage-Smith and Y. Rapoport, *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe: The Book of Curiosities*, Leiden, The Netherlands, Brill, 2013.

[11] Cf. Z. Olgun, *Doing History in Public*, May 3, 2023.

Since antiquity there has been a desire to fix on a map a description of the fluctuating and unstable world of islands. Melville warned us that «it is not down in any map; true places never are» (*Moby Dick*).

The mobile perimeter of islands makes them difficult to define. The challenge is not just writing about them, but to «write them». An island seemingly running out of the frame, **[Fig. 2]** like Chagall's donkey, seems to suggest the difficulty of reading insular spaces whose names changed over the course of time, just as their borders did. Still, as Umberto Eco writes:

> islands have always fascinated except for the isolated case of the Priest Jean; places of Utopia are always located on an island. The island is conceived as a non-place, inaccessible, where one arrives by pure chance and where one cannot return once one leaves. It is on an island where one can build a perfect civilization, where only through legends can we learn of their existence[12].

Fig. 2. *The island of Elba*, in *Description des iles et des côtes de la Méditerranée*, ms. Fr. 2794, fol. 13, 16th, France, BnF, Paris.

The attempt to map islands, utopic or heterotopic spaces as Foucault would read them[13], passes through the pen and gives birth to in-

[12] U. Eco, *Preface*, Benedetto Bordone, *Isolario*, Torino, Nino Aragno Editore, 2000.

[13] M. Foucault, *Des espaces autres*, in «Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité», 5, 1984, pp. 46-49.

sular books a literary genre that became successful starting with Buondelmonti, who travelled for sixteen years to the Aegean and described and mapped each island [**Fig. 3**]. To be sure, the very first example of an Island Book comes from Greece with Diodorus Siculus. An erudite historian and contemporary of Julius Caesar who tried to conquer Britain, the extreme island of Europe, in his *Bibliotheca Storica* (*The Library of History*, 60–30 BC). Chapter V is dedicated to islands and to their fascinating and multiform nature. The Aegean Sea is predominant, occupying almost half of the book, but for Diodorus the insular spaces of the Archipelago are just books in his library, a pretext to evoke a myth.

Fig. 3. *Hidrography. The Aegean Sea,* in Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 1v, 15th-16th century.

How should islands be read? The answer came with Bordone's *Isolario* or *Book of Islands* (1524). In the preface he writes that he intends to locate islands «ordinatamente neli loro luoghi poste», where they belong, or «in their places», and that he worked night and day to «componere», that is «to compose», his book. Describing islands is a way to localize them «in their places», in the attempt to fix them. Carlo Vecce justly says in his *Il sorriso di Caterina*: «If it is not written, it does not exist»[14].

To localize, as island books do, entails mapping, that is establishing *relations among locations*, namely, among islands. In fact, as argued by Franco Moretti:

> Relations among locations as more significant than locations as such… But for geography, locations as such *are* significant; geography is not just 'extension' (Cerreti), but 'intension' too: the quality of given space… the stratification of *intrinsically different qualities* and heterogeneous phenomena[15].

Those relations lead to maps that, when it comes to a systematic study of modes of representation of insular space, become *visible speech*, as Dante would say, or literary cartography. As brilliantly argued by Tally, the advantage of reading maps in geocritical terms is to be found in the paratextual role played by maps, as spaces used to organize the narrative and the anthropological interrelation between stories of civilizations and places[16]. One fascinating example is the geoliterary focus of *The Book of Curiosities,* which is able to show the Muslim commercial centres of the 9th- to 11th-century eastern Mediterranean, such as Sicily, the textile-producing town of Tinnīs in the Nile Delta, and Mahdīyah in modern Tunisia. The author is equally acquainted with Byzantine-controlled areas of the Mediterranean, such as Cyprus, the Aegean Sea, and the southern coasts of Anatolia.

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[14] C. Vecce, *Il sorriso di Caterina. La mamma di Leonardo,* Firenze, Giunti, 2023, p. 131.

[15] F. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, (Verso Books 2005), London, New York, Verso Books, 2007, p. 55.

[16] R. T. Tally Jr., *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, New York, Palgrave McMillan, 2011; *Literary Cartography: Narrative as a Spatially Symbolic Act*, in «New American Notes Online», 11, 2011.

2. Writing Islands

But let's start where everything begins: that is, with islands as literary spaces in a sea of paper.

In the *De montibus* (1355 -1360)[17], the first geographic dictionary, a section dedicated to islands is missing. Would Boccaccio ever imagine that this «absence» would lead to the new genre of the *Isolari* or Island Books? In fact, in 1385 the Florentine Domenico Silvestri decides to write *De insulis et earum proprietatibus*, about islands and their properties, with the only intention to make up for Boccaccio's gap[18]. In 1420 another Florentine, Cristoforo Buondelmonti, would write a *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, a description of the Aegean & other islands.

What do these authors have in common, besides their native Florence, and why does this matter in this contribution to a volume on *Literary spaces of the Mediterranean*? They all use poetry together with geography and, more precisely, they share a figurative mode of representation of islands, which are seen as pages on which to write in a sea that is book and with a boat as pen, similar to the common metaphor of writing as ploughing the paper. Furthermore, they all write in Latin to create an insular space, effectively making islands, especially those of the Aegean Sea, into literary spaces.

The *De montibus*, the first geographic treatise, is written in Latin and it was conceived by Boccaccio as a tool for erudite people to localize the geographic names that he found in classical texts focusing on the seas where these locations belonged. This is why according to the geographer Claudio Greppi, the section on the seas is the key to understanding the *De montibus*. The names and geographic positions that interest Boccaccio end up making an absolutely original chart organized around the different denominations of the sea[19]. He uses this

[17] G. Boccaccio, *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus et de diversis nominibus maris,* in M. Pastore Stocchi (ed.), vol. VII-VIII in V. Branca (ed.), *Boccaccio. Tutte le opere*, Milano, Mondadori, 1998. Hereafter cited as *De montibus*.

[18] See more on Silvestri who annotated Boccaccio's Zibaldone Magliabechiano, in A. Piacentini, *Le annotazioni di Silvestri sullo Zibaldone Magliabechiano di Giovanni Boccaccio,* in «Aevum», 91-2, 2017, pp. 571-584.

[19] C. Greppi, *Il dizionario geografico di Boccaccio. Luoghi e paesaggi nel De montibus*, in R. Morosini (ed.), *Boccaccio geografo. Un viaggio nel Mediterraneo tra le città, i giardini e… il mondo di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Firenze, Maurio Pagliai Editore, 2010, pp. 89-102.

chart in order to navigate through the places of myth, history and poetry[20] in the *Genealogy,* where often, as I mention elsewhere[21], Boccaccio cross-references the *De montibus*.

Around 1345, in the fiction of the *Genealogy,* Boccaccio is a seafarer who navigates in his own name – Giovanni – through the books of the ancients. The narrator starts coming down the hill of Certaldo and through the river Elsa embarks as a «new sailor» on a «frail skiff», on a metaphorical journey through the Mediterranean Sea, to prove the truth of the poets. He «ploughs» the salty sea of ancient texts in search of the truth of myths, by means of a «small boat» that is his study, the *Genealogy* itself, thus confirming that sailing and the numerous nautical metaphors throughout the prefaces of each of this work's fifteen books, and its conclusive chapter, serve a strictly functional role in the poetical project of this treatise in defence of poetry.

Giovanni traverses «vast regions of lands and the sea» (I Preface, I 14), where the poets claim that most of those myths, or fictions, actually took place, to find some truth of the «insaniam veterum» (I Preface, I 4), (*the foolishness of the ancients*), who considered themselves descendants of the gods, as the fables of the poets had it. The intention is to explain to the king of Cyprus and Jerusalem «the meaning wise men had hidden under the foolish outer layers of these inane fables of the ancient poets» (I Preface, I 7).

But what does an erudite work like Boccaccio's *Genealogy*, have to do with the Renaissance Island books? In the fiction of the treatise, Giovanni in search of places where the myths unfolded, carries out an *indagatione*, an exploration (XIV, Pref., 1), throughout a space as realistic as the Mediterranean Sea in order to *perquisire* and find «the philosophical where» of civilization so that he could defend the truth of poetry. During this figurative voyage, he sailed twice to the islands of the Aegean.

I argue that Giovanni's relentless crossing this sea in the fiction of this treatise, never studied in maritime terms, inspired Silvestri and

[20] M. Pastore Stocchi, *De montibus*, *op. cit*., 1817.

[21] I have studied the implications of the nautical motive that runs through the work and appears with the image of the narrator/sailor in R. Morosini, *Boccaccio's Cartography of Poetry or the Geocritical Navigation of the Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* in *Ends of Poetry* for *California Italian Studies*, eds. T. Harrison – G.M. Novi, 8, 2019, https://escholarship.org/uc/ismrg_cisj, and more recently *Rotte di poesia, rotte di civiltà*, *op. cit*.

Buondelmonti's Island Books. A study of their approach to the description of islands shall show the effects of this new literary genre in the making of the "Other" and of the spaces of Otherness.

Buondelmonti, a priest that gravitated around pre-humanistic circles in Florence, undertakes a journey to the Aegean to describe and map the islands there. Let's see from up close how his descriptions of the islands and, above all, the effects of the islands play a geopolitical role.

4. Island books

The poet-captain of the *Genealogy* sails twice, he claims, to the Aegean Sea, visiting the islands that make this sea the most relevant portion of the Mediterranean, accounting perhaps also for its Greek name (the ruler of the sea – *Archi* = chief and *pelagos* = sea). The Archipelago, or the ancient name for the Aegean Islands, forms a straight line from Rhodes to the promontory of Malea Cape (formerly known at San Angelo Cape). It stretches for 450 miles in one direction and, from Crete to Tenedos, for 500 miles to contain the whole Aegean Sea, as Giorgio Ieranò explains[22].

From the Elsa and Arno rivers the voyager goes to the Tyrrhenian Sea, whence he reaches the Aegean and the coasts of Egypt, Syria, and Cyprus (Books II- IV), all the way up to the shores of Attica and Athens (Book V). Then the poet-seafarer sails back through the Western Mediterranean to Rome and the Etruscan shores and, with the help of God to the «insueta maria» (VII Preface, 2), to the unfamiliar waters of the Ocean through the Sea of the Lion and the Strait of Gibraltar. From here the seafarer sails back to the Aegean, arriving at the island of Samos (Book IX). The journey pauses in Crete (Book XI) and, after enjoying a celebration of the Mediterranean and of the progeny of Neptune (Book X), continues into the waters of the Western Mediterranean, stopping at the sites of Miseno, Ischia, Cuma, the Aeolian Islands, and Sicily (Books XII–XIII).

In the fiction of *De insulis*, the writer, Domenico Silvestri (1335-1411) is also a seafarer who with his little boat crosses rivers in order to see and describe the islands and their properties, or at least he claims to do so, as we shall see.

[22] G. Ieranò, *Arcipelago. Isole e miti del Mar Egeo*, Torino, Einaudi, 2018, p. 4.

As it moves from island to island with the intention of describing them, one could say that the first island book is the *De insulis et earum proprietatibus* (*On Islands and their properties*). Written between 1385-1406[23], with 900 entries, *De insulis* provides an encyclopaedia of «islands and their properties». Silvestri lists the islands in alphabetic order– a model that Boccaccio adopts in the *De montibus* from Vibius Sequester's *De fluminibus* – according to a number of geographical, historical, ethnographic, archaeological as well as moral and allegorical sources[24], drawing from Greek and Latin repertories as well as from contemporaries like the *Fons memorabilium universi* (*Source of notable information about the universe*) by Domenico Bandini of Arezzo (1335-1418), who dedicates some sections of his book to islands.

Silvestri's *De insulis* stems from the *De montibus*, as he states in the introduction that his intention is to complete Boccaccio's geographical treatise that indeed leaves out "writing" the islands. «Shaped from without, as well as from within», as Goethe would say[25] since, if it is true that islands were not given a specific section in the *De montibus*, Boccaccio locates them where they belong, in seas or rivers (e.g. islands are named in the *mare Hesperium* and the Ethiopian Sea, as well as those related to the rivers Po and Rhine, and so on), probably thanks to the *mappamondi* attributed to the Genoese cartographer Pietro Vesconte, which he could have accessed via Paolino Veneto's *Chronologia* or Marino Sanudo's *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*. Besides, it is hard to think that Boccaccio would avoid or forget about islands. For Boccaccio «islands were more approachable in virtue of the first expeditions in the Atlantic, that made sailors able, thanks to the trade winds, to reach the islands and come back after localizing them with the few rudimental nautical tools they had available»[26].

[23] J. M. Montesdeoca Medina, *Los Islarios de la época del humanismo: el de insulis de Domenico Silvestri*, Edición y traducción, Ph.D. thesis, Universidad de la Laguna.

[24] C. Pecoraro, *Domenico Silvestri. De insulis et earum proprietatibus*, Atti della Accademia di Scienze, Lettere et Arti di Palermo, ser. cuarta, XIV, parte seconda: Lettere, fasc. II, Palermo 1954.

[25] Moretti (*op. cit*., p. 57), quotes from *Goethe, Toward a General Comparative Theory, 1790-1794*, in «Scientific Studies», Princeton, 1995, p. 55.

[26] C. Greppi, *art. cit*., The *alisei* (trade winds) are the prevailing winds that blow on the ocean waters.

Boccaccio was fascinated by new geographic explorations and by islands, not only as places of *mirabilia*, but also by their landscape and their inhabitants. As discussed by T. Cachey, Boccaccio shows in the *De Canaria et insulis reliquis ultra Ispaniam in Oceano noviter repertis*[27] an anthropological approach to the recently discovered islands of the Western Ocean, as he transcribed in his small treatise *De Canaria* in the Zibaldone Magliabechiano (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, B.R. 50). A large miscellany, the Latin text announces, five years after Lanzarotto Malocello, the discovery of the Canary Islands on the basis of a lost letter written in Seville by Florentine merchants who, in 1341, sailed from Lisbon to what the ancients called the Fortunate islands.

Let's read what Silvestri writes about the genesis of the *De insulis* as a supplement to Boccaccio's gap on islands:

> Cum pluries mecum revolverem quot Iohannes Boccaccius de Certaldo, concivis noster et poeta pleclarus, montes et promuntoria porrigentia se inmare descripserit, *quot stagna, lacus et flumina sua puppe transiverit*, quot quandoque *sinus et maria ornato suo navigio sulcaverit*, non ambigo vel ventosis procellis actus, vel recreationis causa sepe navigio ad insulas pervenisse, vel, eo navigante, aut penes in eas incidisse, aut incidendi timore evitasse. Sed miror non modicum sibi insulis occurrentibus sepe aut in eis mora eo trahente quod ipsarum situs, submersiones emersionesque in eis etiam que mirifice gesta queve auditu mira narrantur visuque comprenduntur, eum non traxerint ad scribendum cum silvas, lacus et paludes et flumina excedere videantur et in numero et in rebus magnificis; plura enim et relatu digna mentemque admiratione motura et lectu seria scituque iocunda gesta ac visa leguntur in insulis quam paludibus, stagnis, lacubus vel in silvis. Sed maius opus arduumque tunc fuerat aggressus quo multum digredi non licebat. Quapropter, ut sicut montes fontesque stagna et paludes diversis autorum libris sparsa in unum ad usum legentium colliguntur, ita de insulis, quantum capere ruditas mea posset, quedam in eis gesta, quedam visu crediturque mira quove mari locoque sint posita, popularibus et usitatis verbis et non quieti otioque pallentibus, sed negotiis convenientibus transcripturus / *** scribendo addiscendo *** solum et *** vis prosim. (*De insulis*, ed. Montesdeoca Medina, cit., p. 6)

[27] Cfr. M. Pastore Stocchi, *Il "De Canaria" boccaccesco e un locus deperditus nel "De insulis" di Domenico Silvestri*, in «Rinascimento», 10, 1959, pp. 146-152.

> [Remembering often how Giovanni Boccaccio from Certaldo, our citizen and very illustrious poet, has described many mountains and promontories that expand in the sea, *how many lagoons, lakes and rivers he has sailed with his boat, how many gulfs and seas each time he has crossed with his equipped boat* (*ornato navigio*), I have no doubt, that he, exhausted by the strong winds or to recover strength, arrived on the islands with his boat completely worn-out, he avoided them for fear to fall on them. However, my surprise is not little, since, finding himself so many times close to the islands or approaching with some caution to them, their localizations, collapses and emersion where also marvellous deeds are narrated or stories that seduce the ears and fascinate the eye, had not moved him to write when it is evident that they overcome the woods, lakes, lagoons and rivers, in numbers as well as magnificent in the thing itself, in fact, on the islands one can read more deeds and prodigies – that are worth to narrate and that provoke admiration, a serious reading and a delightful learning – than ponds, lakes, lagoons, or woods. However, he had already undertaken a vast and difficult task that he could not deviate his journey excessively. For this reason, in the same way that mountain, water sources, lagoons and ponds, scattered in different books by many authors, are reunited in one book to the advantages of the readers, I will do the same for the islands to the extent that my ignorance is capable of understanding, I am going to write some facts that unfolded there, some admirable deeds to see and believe or in *which sea and place they have been situated, with common and current words*, and not with (words) that are weak due to their resting for too long, little used, but (words) familiar in trades, (and eventually) writing and learning ….only….. *vis prosim, may (the gods?) give me the strength to bring to completion* the project of describing the islands [translation is my own].

The insistence is on writing about islands and on using accessible and not cryptic words to give an account of their *mirabilia*. The expected effect of the islands is to surprise.

Silvestri openly suggests, from the start, that islands are the pages that he reaches with his pen, a little boat, crossing rivers. The *De insulis* is born with the ambition to fill a gap in a geographic treatise (*De montibus*). Silvestri criticizes the choice of the author (Boccaccio) not to include the islands. Taking his distance from Odoric of Pordenone, he refers in ten places in the book to Marco Polo's description of islands[28]

[28] Cfr. M. Pastore Stocchi, *Pagine di storia dell'Umanesimo italiano*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2014, p. 164.

and quotes Cicero to support his truth claims, deciding according to his own criteria to bring delight to his readers:

> I would describe some of them, if, by mixing stories and fables of the ancients with those of the modern writers and sometimes with those who deserve it among our contemporaries. I did not compromise the trust in the truth with lies; and, although what Odoric writes was certain, it is prudent to take as a guide and imitate those whose antiquity and authority inspire more confidence (*De insulis*, 20-28)[29].

Islands are for Silvestri the space where he stages his ability as a writer, the perfect space where «deeds and phenomena more interesting that those connected to ponds, lakes and forests unfold» (*De insulis*, ed. cit., p. 8). He admits, however, that writing about islands is difficult. It is «more complicated and difficult than one may think at first sight, especially considering the infinite number of islands, and their mutable names, and not only of the islands but also of the seas and places, offer much difficulty to those who manifest their desire to write» (*De insulis*, ed. cit. p. 9). His difficulty of writing about islands comes from those who wrote about them in the past, a parameter of difficulty that depends not on geography but on literature and on previous writers:

> … even if this seems insignificant and small to those who approach it, facing it is more complicated and difficult than one may think at first sight, especially considering the infinite number of islands, and their mutable names, and not only of the islands but also of the seas and places, offer much difficulty to those who manifest their desire to write. In fact, writers change so much the names of places that sometimes it is extremely difficult to establish in which place, sea or gulf is an island is, and it is very easy to make a mistake. Moreover, so many and so big islands exist in every ocean of our hemisphere for which we have no information or authors wrote without assigning them a name, that I believe it is impossible that all, not even a small part, could be understood completely. How many, and only in the water of the Agio, a small portion of the Aegean Sea, deceive the numerous experts of navigation, signal that their borders appear between Acaya and Crete, and between Rhodes and Sergesta; so many in the Illyric sea, let's say, a point in the Adriatic sea, then, according to what documents Pliny, the margins of the Illyric are populated of more than thousand islands. For what the Oriental and Western islands is con-

[29] Silvestri, *De insulis*, ed. cit. p. 8. Translation from *De insulis*, here and elsewhere, is my own.

> cerned, there are some what is impossible to navigate; all those are small seas, almost close to be insignificant if compared to the huge dimension of the Ocean, the great unknown (Silvestri, *De insulis*, cit.).

As noted by Pastore Stocchi, with Silvestri we move away from the alphabetic model of the geographic dictionary as a tool for understanding the literary texts. Although he shows autonomous geographic interests in the first phase of the Umanesimo, «an encyclopaedic ambition with an end in itself, made through an accumulation of information of the most diverse nature and provenance» (p. 140), prevails.

If physical geography through literature is restored in Boccaccio's *Genealogy* where poetry is defended with cartography, by mapping the places where the myths unfolded, especially on the islands of the Aegean, with Silvestri the literary takes over geography.

Crossing the Aegean Sea, the *pontos apeiritos*, that means the *sea without borders*, Giovanni ends up connecting the islands, taking his distance from the fanciful aspects of the myths. Buondelmonti seems to do the same as he announces that the Aegean is not named after the king Aegeus:

> The ancients thought that the Aegean Sea was named after king Aegeus, alleged to be the father of Theseus. It begins at the Hellespont and washes an undulating coastline as far as Cape Malea extends. *Cyclos* in Greek means circle, *circulus* in Latin, and here all the islands lying like a wheel among the reefs of the Archipelago, are called the Cyclades**.** The general divisions of the description having been completed; we descend to the particulars of the aforesaid islands (Buondelmonti, ed. cit., p. 96).

Many aspects of Buondelmonti's *Liber* lead back to Boccaccio's *Genealogy* as both are writing islands, and they are both sailing in the Aegean with the intent of saving the Greek past.

5. Island. Artistic, cultural, and geopolitical space

Cristoforo Buondelmonti, a Florentine like Boccaccio and Silvestri, was a priest gravitating around the pre-humanist circles in Florence. He often sailed to the Aegean Islands to bring back Greek manuscripts to Niccolò Niccoli, whose library holds a codex that Buondelmonti bought for him in Crete. He wrote up his adventures and observations and sent them to Niccolò. Over the next dozen years, he traversed the Greek seas, going from island to island, writing up a descriptive text about each, and drawing a map.

The first version of the manuscript, completed in 1420, was dedicated to wealthy bibliophile, Cardinal Giordano Orsini. Henricus Martellus Germanus, who produced, in 1475 ca., a copy of the *Liber insularum* translated by Evelyn Edson whose edition I mostly used in this essay, leaved out most of the complimentary phrases addressed to the Cardinal. But Buondelmonti had organized his work with an acrostic, made out of the first letter of each entry (INCIPIT LIBER INSULARUM ARCIPELAGI EDITUS PER PRESBYTERUM CHRISTOPHORUM DE BONDELMONTIBUS DE FLORENTIA QUEM MISIT DE CIVITATE RHODI ROMAM DOMINO JORDANO CARDINALI DE URSINIS ANNO DOMINI M CCCC XXII), where he says that Christopher Buondelmonti, priest of Florence wrote the Book of the islands of the Archipelago and sent this to Cardinal Giordano Orsini from Rhodes (1420, Paris, BnF, ms. Lat. 4823, fols 2-2v)[30]. Martellus Germanus also left out the following passage: «When you see the initial red letters of the descriptive passage, you will find my name and yours and the place and the time in which I completed this work». Also, in the conclusion of his *Liber*, he mentions Orsini.

The reason why I am dwelling on these elements that Martellus Germanus eliminates, is to show that what brings Buondelmonti close to Giovanni's seafaring is their empirical approach. As they narrate what they have seen and where they have seen it, they assume the mariner's perspectives, that is, they focus on the way they navigated the Mediterranean, not using physical maps, but producing what we can call mental maps based on a repertory of shared book-based knowledge. Boccaccio relied on scientific sources that valued "experience" in his concept of poetry, thanks to the rise of nautical maps and of Scholastic methods, the teaching of his «venerable» preceptor Andalò di Negro celebrated together with Dante and Petrarch (XV VI, 4), and whose *ractatus sphaerae* Boccaccio transcribes in his *Zibaldone mediceo laurenziano* (Plut. XXIX, 8), but also the ancient Hyginus' *Astronomica*, Varro's *De agricultura* and Vitruvius' *De architectura*.

About Buondelmonti, moving around the humanistic circle, he certainly had available Ptolemy's *Cosmography* that was introduced in Florence between 1406 and 1410. Orsini, who was also interested in maps, had a copy of the book in his library early on. In fact, Ptolemy's original *Geographia* by Strabo was known in Italy at least from the third decade of the cen-

[30] At Rhodes Buondelmonti served as dean of the cathedral chapter in 1430, and here spent the last years of his life.

tury, a translation from Greek into Latin started in 1451 by Guarino Veronese (Books I-X) and Gregorio Tifernate (XI -XVII). In 1477, the humanist Domizio Calderini Calderini had announced the edition of the tables of Ptolemy, and the *Observationes*, but he died in 1478 without completing his project[31].

Ptolemy brought a concept of location by astronomical coordinates and showed maps divorced from theological content. Buondelmonti, however, makes only one reference to him, and he does not make use of his coordinate system, offering more of a catalogue as well as the first stand-alone maps of most of the islands, alongside quotes from Ovid, Virgil, Barlaam of Calabria, and Papias.

Like Boccaccio's *Genealogy*, but also Dante's *Commedia* and Petrarch's *Itinerary to the Holy Land*, Buondelmonti attempts to define geographical space through literature, by means of the pen that becomes a boat, although he sails there for over a dozen years.

But let's examine from up close the modes of representation and effects of Buondelmonti's islands. Giovanni's periegesis of the Arcipelago, where the fables of the ancients mostly spread in the *Genealogy*, helped to establish Buondelmonti's *Liber* as a new literary genre, but the two Florentines had different goals in wanting to rescue a past that risked being lost. Although it was a metaphorical sailing in Giovanni's case, through navigation he traced a cartography of poetry, mapping and giving unity to all those relics of the ancient past.

6. The sea of paper: Giovanni and Cristoforo crossing the Oriental Mediterranean

What sparked my interest in these two texts, Boccaccio's *Genealogy* and Buondelmonti's *Liber*, which apparently bear no direct relation to each other, is that both were motivated to undertake a sea voyage from Tuscany to the islands of the Aegean with the intention to collect, give unity to, and rescue the scattered remains of Greek knowledge.

The passion for island books is strictly related for both Giovanni and Cristoforo to the humanistic discovery of Greek civilization: Boccaccio's celebration of Leontius Pilatus, who was a protagonist at his time of the revival of Greek in Western scholarship and to whom Boc-

[31] On Ptolemy's *Geography* in Florence, see P. Gautier Dalché, *La "Géographie" de Ptolémée en Occident (IVe–XVIe siècle)*.Turnhout, Brepols, 2009.

caccio owed some material for the *Genealogy* itself. Book XIV, dedicated to the function of poetry, praises Leontius but also Barlaam the Greek monk from Calabria who taught the language in Florence, and he is cited as a source by Boccaccio for information on Greek mythology. Also, Buondelmonti mentions Barlaam when he relates on outstanding deeds that occurred in Ithaca, but his intention is not, like Boccaccio, to locate the genealogy of the pagan gods and the defence of the veracity of ancient poetry in space rather than time[32], presuming to sail to the regions where mythical events unfolded, describing them, and recalling local myths, because he was an eyewitness of those places.

Boccaccio, the poet-geographer of the *Genealogy* follows Petrarch and Dante, and reiterates the idea that poetry is mainly an art of *colligere* (I Preface, 40)[33], of organizing and unifying scattered dimensions of knowledge; yet differently from his two predecessors, and following classical geographers, he does so through the narrative of a maritime traveller to the sites of the myths.

Going twice to the Aegean to locate the philosophical locus of civilization, Giovanni does not merely identify the place through the myth as did Diodorus Siculus. Islands are not mythopoetic spaces. They do not produce the myths, but often take their name from the mythical event that took place in those spaces, sometimes even determining a craft, producing a toponymy whose eponyms of a city, a river, and a sea are derived from them, and not the contrary.

The most recurring verb that accompanies sailing for Boccaccio and Buondelmonti is «to see» and to grant credibility by means of geography and to inform of the dangers on the routes. But, when Buondelmonti evokes a storm or a danger at sea, it is real and he loves to give personal details to lend authenticity to his account. He tells us that he was shipwrecked and nearly died of starvation on the island of Fourni and his work, just Boccaccio's, was embellished with active verbs of travel: «now we cross over», our boat now makes its way, we descend the slope, again to emphasize his

[32] See more in R. Morosini, «Le 'favole' dei poeti e il 'buon governo' per Paolino Veneto: il trattato in volgare veneziano *de regime rectoris* e il *de diis gentium et fabulis poetarum*», in M. Ciccuto, R. Morosini (eds.), *Paolino Veneto. Storico, narratore e geografo*, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2019, pp. 167-214.

[33] *Videre* (to see), *intelligere* (to understand), *servare* (to keep), *exarare et in opus collecta deducere* [«to set it all down in writing and organize the work»] (*Geneal*. I Preface, pp. 14-15).

personal experience and lending authenticity to an account that in both cases is given by their first names: Giovanni and Cristoforo.

After seven days he went to a cave and carved these words on the rock with his sword: *Here Christopher the priest died of mortal hunger* (p. 139), and similarly in Iachintos, where Buondelmonti's aunt is buried. Also, like Boccaccio who relates in his *Genealogy* to the *De fluminibus* in his own book *De montibus* to learn more about the rivers Po and Nile, as I note in *Rotte di poesia*, Cristoforo also refers for Crete to his book on Crete, both addressing themselves to the dedicatees of their works: Hugh of Cyprus and the Cardinal Giordano Orsini.

7. Collecting islands and mapping the Aegean

To map the Aegean means to catalogue a *mare historiarum* through the myths that fill this sea. It is almost like a cinematographic technique that summarizes a long journey in a montage of single shots: the catalogue of the islands is a description of a geographic space and at the same time the pretext to narrate the myths unfolding there[34], drawing on literary sources.

When he describes Cephalonia, Buondelmonti claims: «I have read in ancient chronicles many wanderers without something to drink, never finding water, must take in the breeze from the mountains with an open mouth to drink in the summer heat», a story that can be found in the Pseudo-Aristotle's *De mirabilium auditu* where the wanderers were goats, not humans.

While Boccaccio dwells on inventions that were useful to humanity, Buondelmonti makes note of environmental aspects and of any resources, from fertile fields and water supplies to special resources, such as emery on Naxos and mastic gum, a highly-prized resin on Chios, ever since the Roman period. Often the religious sailor dwells on the tales of *mirabilia*, but like Boccaccio he has a tendency to reject all that is openly fanciful.

A single detail is enough to evoke a story. For example, Naxos evokes Dionysus and wine.

Naxos [**Fig. 4**]: It is the island that he sees through the moral eye of the religious Cristoforo. Diodorus Siculus narrates that Dionysus appeared on the island and saw Arianna, who was so beautiful that kidnapped her from Theseus and married her. Theseus, out of grief, forgot about what Aegeus told

[34] G. Ieranò, *Arcipelago*, cit.

him and arrived in Attica with black sails. It is a different version of the myth that narrates how he left when she was sleeping and when she woke up, she only saw the black sails. Boccaccio calls her Adriana instead of Arianna and depicts the princess as an alcoholic nymphomaniac: a «vinolenta». Naxos and Chios are islands abounding in wine and for this Adriana has been taken and abandoned by a drunk Theseus. Because she gave her herself over to wine, she married Bacchus. Then, since the honesty of a woman is corrupted by wine, Venus gave her a crown, that is the sign of libido, that is brought to the sky so that everyone can see it. So it is not only the sign of shame on everyone's mouth, but a sign that a woman let herself have sex with everyone thanks to the effect of wine (Boccaccio *Geneal*. XI 29 and *De casibus* I 10).

Fig. 4. *Island of Naxos* (monastery, fortifications, Arianna. Geographic names "Fons in qua Adriana relicta fuit a teseo"), in C. Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 21r BnF, Paris.

On Crete lived Saturn, who taught ignorant people to cultivate the land and to sow seed in the fields, and he ordered them to gather the har-

vest. His son, saved by Saturn's wife, moved to mount Ida to be nursed. There are many gods called Jupiter, but this Cretan one was greater than them all, since he introduced many things good and useful to human life.

For Rhodes [**Fig. 5**], where he claims to have lived for 8 years, he says that is the most pleasant island of the Mediterranean: the laws of the sea appear to have had their origin. He goes ahead and praises the inhabitants of Symi, who are very resourceful, as they travel in their boats between the cities of the Turks and those of the Rhodians, busily seeking their sustenance. The anthropological eye of Buondelmonti always leaves room to wonder about the contribution of men to the environment, to celebrate human ingenuity through a maritime life that finds its rhetorical space in the harbours.

Fig. 5. *Island of Rhodes. Insula Roddi* (Rhodes, churches, vegetation, fortifications, rivers, windmills, a castle, an inscription "in insula secundum papias antea vocabatur officus condita a cercope"), in C. Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 11r BnF, Paris.

As he specifies that in the south there are reefs at which ships frequently lower their sails, or that in Calchis there is such an abundance of figs «that they enrich the ships sailing past these places» (Buondelmonti, ed. cit., p.113). Churches, rivers, springs, and windmills stand out on the map of this island, while geographic names depend heavily on legendary geography, even when he quotes Papias, as we read on the map of Rhodes «in insula secundum papias antea vocabatur officus condita a cercope» (Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, BnF, Paris, ms. Lat. 4823, fol. 11).

There is more. Buondelmonti takes the same approach as Boccaccio, when he explains to Orsini his intention to embark on a little boat to collect and give unity to what is scattered, namely the islands:

> Cicladum caeterarumque insularum hinc inde *sparsarum enarrationis et picturae libellum* aggressus non antiquos scriptores tantum imitatus quaeque ab his describuntur verum est quae hodie in illis sunt antiquae novaeque formae nec non civitates, castra, fonte, nemora, flumina, maria, montes, promontoria, portus atque loci naturam succinte breviterque *recensere ac depingere constitui. Quo etiam veroria memorentur non qua auribus percepised quae ipse ego in sex annis* propriis luminibus post multa discrimina rerum & vidi & tetigi describentur quae nonmodo legentibus gratissima erunt verum etiam navigantibus utillima si didicerint quae petenda quae ve sint e fugienda quae singula quam maxima brevitate percurram et insularum numerum ac nomina explicabo ut facile legentibus iter pateat. (Buondelmonti, ed. cit, p. 19).

> [I have herewith undertaken to write *a little book of text and pictures* of the Cyclades and the other scattered islands, *not merely copying the ancient writers by whom they were described, but setting forth both the ancient appearances and those they have today, not only cities, castles, springs, groves of trees, rivers, seas, mountains, promontories, ports and towns, but I also survey and depict the nature of each place clearly and briefly.* So that more accurate facts might be placed *in memory,* I will describe *not what I have learned by hearsay but what I have seen* in the past six years *with my own eyes* after much reflection, which will be very pleasing not only to readers but most useful to sailors, once they know what places they might be seeking and the point from which they are departing. With the greatest brevity I will run through the number and names of the islands one by one and will explain them so that an easy road lies open for the readers].

So far, the scope seems noble since Boccaccio also writes that he embarks on a little ship to collect the fragments of a huge shipwreck, sharing the attempt to collect into one, to systematize knowledge:

> Undique in tuum desiderium, *non aliter quam si per vastum litus ingentis naufragii fragmenta colligerem sparsas, per infinita fere volumina deorum gentilium reliquias colligam*, quas comperiam, et collectas evo diminutas atque semesas et fere attritas in unum genealogie corpus quo potero ordine, ut tuo fruaris voto, redigam. (Boccaccio, *Geneal.* I Preface, 40).
>
> [To carry out your project, *not otherwise than if I were collecting fragments along the vast shores of a huge shipwreck, I will collect the remnants of the pagan gods strewn everywhere in a nearly infinite number of volumes, and once found and collected*, even if they are ravaged and half eaten by time and nearly worn to nothing, *I will reduce them into a single corpus* of genealogy, *arranged* to the best of my ability, to satisfy your wish].

In the *Liber insularum,* the Mediterranean Sea emerges as a structural place of conjunction and reunion, to use Corbellari's parameters to read the sea[35]. Like Giovanni in the *Genealogy,* Buondelmonti is Asclepius, the one who restores unity to the dismembered and dilacerated body of Hippolytus. The poet-sailor of the *Genealogy* acts as «another Asclepius» by sailing through the sea of ancient writings and recomposes dismembered pieces of knowledge through sight, since knowledge passes through the eyes, allowing places where useful inventions were developed to come back to life from death and oblivion. Buondelmonti's plan, in comparison, is to claim on behalf of the Christian West the spaces of the Greek past: the islands of the Aegean. In fact, Buondlemonti's real intention is kept in a manuscript of his *Liber*, ms Lat. 4823: to collect is *to encompass*, in Francis's words, literally in the sense of possessing, claiming ownership on behalf of the Christian West. Let's read how the Florentine priest admits going to the Aegean, as if on a mission, facing the storms and risks at sea, to rescue the islands from the «the dangers of the infidels» (*postquam periculis infidelium*), that is to prevent Turkish Ottoman expansion*:*

> Constitui, pater reuerendissime iordane cardinalis, meis itineribus tibi *librum insularum cicladum atque aliarum in circuitu sparsarum destinare fi-*

[35] A. Corbellari, *La mer, espace structurant du roman courtois*, in C. Connochie-Bourgne (ed.), *Mondes marins du Moyen Age*, in «Senefiance», Paris, 2006, pp. 105-113.

> *gurarum una* atque suis temporibus priscis usque in hodiernum gestis. (2) Qui *postquam periculis infidelium* paruisque procelis omnia in sex percensita annis iam exacta adolescentia atque mea florentia derelicta colocensem amenissimam petij ciuitatem, *ut finis a modo esset meorum iam laborum et aliorum hinc inde scalarum ascendere* (*Liber Insularum Arcipelagi*, BnF, Paris, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 1r).

He says that he lived in the city of the Colossus (a statue of the Greek sun-god Helios erected in the harbour), that is in Rhodes, in the hands of the Knights Hospitaller, and he even alludes to his journey as a hard task, quoting from Cacciaguida's words to Dante about «come è duro calle /lo scendere e 'l salir *per l'altrui scale*» (how hard is the way, / going down and then up *another man's stairs*, Par. XVII 60), with the precise intention to present his seafaring as a navigation towards exile in "another" space. This self-reference to himself as the poet Dante further proves how the priest Buondelmonti is portraying the islands of the Aegean as spaces of Otherness, where he is exiled, not belonging but still going there with a sense of a dangerous Christian mission to save them.

Let's look at the island of Chios from up close, as it is a good example of Buondelmonti's approach to the insular spaces of the Aegean, with a Mediterranocentric view of the superiority of the West that makes those islands their own patrimony to be recollected and saved from the Ottoman Turks.

Chios **[Fig.6]** is separated from Turkey by the Chios Strait. The maps illustrate the topography and the landscape where the political vision of Buondelmonti mixes literary with archaeological elements, to create a landscape that aims to display the dangers posed on such an environment by the Turks. He refers to Thoas, Hypsipile's father who was sent here from Lemnos, the landscape (rivers, vegetation). He mentions «abundant springs», the windmills that hint at the presence of human ingenuity, noting how the island is endowed with fertile plains "endowed with vines of all kinds of fruit" (Buondelmonti, ed. cit., p. 141). Intrigued by the nature and the industrious inhabitants of the island of Chios, he reflects upon the area of Catomerea «which from the southern part through the west among the low hills the inhabitants work skillfully in the prepared ground to produce the gum of mastic from the lentisk trees in the spring time», and Calamoti that «with its plain, said to be the head of mastic production.» (*Ibidem*). An overview of the many

fortresses and towns on the island, lends to nostalgia for Buondelmonti. As he notices «the ruined town formerly called the estate of Homer» he laments that «the sepulchre of the prophet Homer is ravaged by time». About this, he also adds «but from no author have I received a report so that one might be certain of it. So let us leave it to posterity to be investigated» (*Ibidem*).

Fig. 6. *Island of Chios* (fortifications, mills, castles, rivers, Hagios Georgios de Pyrgi, Kalamoti, Kardamyla, Kournos, Melanios, Nea Moni, Parparia, Pityous, Pyrgi, Volissos), in C. Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 29r BnF, Paris.

Fortifications and fortified gates, here and other islands, hint at the frequent raids of pirates that attacked Chios, which by 1302-1303 was a target for the renewed Turkish fleets. When Buondelmonti adds that there is a secure harbour there, built by Genoese – who occupied the island in 1346 with Simone Vignoso – he is showing gratitude at their role in protecting Chios from the infidel Turks.

I will not dwell on many examples here, but let it suffice to examine the map of the island of Kos [**Fig. 7**], an interesting geopolitical case that shows the visible closeness of Turkey. Like on most maps, here churches, fortifications, and ruins speak for the place, where the knight of St. John built a castle in 1400 against the Infidels. The rhetorical power of maps speaks eloquently about islands like Symi, which is all churches and ruins: the projection of the future on the lands of the ancient gods.

Fig. 7. *The island of Kos* (Fortifications, churches, Castle of St. Peter, ruins, river, tower, Turkey), in C. Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 24r BnF, Paris.

8. The rhetorical power of maps. The threats of the Turks (*Turcorum insidiae*)

In a first reading, Buondelmonti's general tendency is to give attention to the landscape and to the useful craft or invention documented by the myths of the poets: i.e. for Ithaca, he recalls Ulysses and salt. For Andros, he uses the Ovidian story of the daughters of Anius, who was the first colonizer of the island. The three girls obtained from Dionysus the power to transform every liquid into wine. The god transformed them into doves to save them from the Greeks who wanted to take them to Troy. The description of the island ends with Buondelmonti opening a window onto his contemporary world and explaining that now, with «the threats of the Turks» (*Turcorum insidiae*), Andros is reduced «in a miserable state» (*ad infimum*), and Raclea and Chero, two small islands «are uncultivated on account of *the incursions of the Turks.* They say that they were formerly inhabited, since ruins can be seen in all parts» («Raclea & Chero due insule parve & montuose videntur & inculte nimis propter *turchorum insidias* quae olim aiunt erant habitate quia vestigia in aliquibus partibus percipitur», pp. 57 and130). This is a recurring statement that he makes to draw a sharp contrast between how they once were and how they were during his time, because of the threats of the Ottoman Turks.

This is different from Giovanni the poet-sailor of the Archipelago. Giovanni sails through the books of the ancient poets, and with his «little bark», «rescues» what remains of the glorious shipwrecked past that he celebrates, to celebrate the eve of civilization. Buondelmonti instead shows his grief when he arrives on the Aegean island of Samos, in front of the broken capitals, remarkable columns scattered in pieces, pedestals ripped from their settings, vaults pulled down, the longest wings of the walls nearly levelled to the ground, and the prodigious edifice undone and sunk in a heap of ruins. He suffers before the ancient temple of Juno, now destroyed. This is how Samos is illustrated in Buondelmonti's *Liber*: all ruins. It is the same when he sails to the Attica. Here, turning toward the shore, he sees Athens and its nearly eroded remnants, an empty city, and feels compassion for the deserted Castalian font of Parnassus, for the cave of Delphic Apollo now mute and speechless, covered by a variety of entwining, creeping roots, for the Boeotian Thebes, now all tumuli of ruins, with the huge edifices of the ancients squalid in their appalling decline.

Time negatively changed the complexion of the Archipelago. Boccaccio had already noticed this when in the *De montibus*, for the entry «Aegean Sea», he writes that «it was once just as full of kingdoms, famous men and wonderful things as it was of islands, but nowadays it languishes under the vile scourge of servitude».

From island to island he moves with his boat explaining the origin of the place by recalling an invention useful to humanity that a god or divine progeny has brought about, mapping them and giving unity to the scattered relics of the Greek past that risk shipwreck if not rescued, and creating connectivity between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. He makes the ancient pagan past a shared heritage of the West in the history of civilization. In this way, by travelling to the Aegean, he collects and rescues the remains of Greek culture from shipwreck. In search of the philosophical origin of civilization, by sailing to the Aegean islands twice Boccaccio signalled that a great deal of civilization could be spatially located there.

Although for both authors the Archipelago is an immense storehouse of a past that is in continuous oscillation between the past and the present – a feature of island books – a collection of the tales of the grandeur and pomp of the antiquity and the splendours of myth, for Buondelmonti the misery of those islands, oppressed by the Turks and «reduced to wastelands» (*in desolationem redactae*), emerges as an important aspect of his enterprise.

The predominant sentiment of his Archipelago is fear: the islanders live in terror of the attacks of pirates and the raids of the Ottomans. A continuing theme is the current degradation of the islands, as the Byzantine Empire was declining in power and the Turks were extending their sway. Pirates were another problem. On some islands the citizens had retreated to fortified castles in the highlands in order to avoid them, while others were abandoned entirely because of pirates.

The sadness in Island Books before the present misery and decadence, according to Ieranò, throws a veil of melancholy on their past glory in an example of what Leonardo Olschki called «insular romanticism»[36]. How-

[36] *Romanticismo insulare* is the title of one of the chapters in L. Olschki, *Storia letteraria delle scoperte geografiche. Studi e ricerche*, [1937] ; Firenze, Olschki, 1999.

ever, Buondelmonti's sadness and nostalgia are motivated by different reasons from Giovanni, the poet-sailor who wanted to save what remains of the past, to defend the truth of poetry and the story of civilization.

On the maps, churches and monasteries stand out in the landscape with broken capitals, destroyed columns, and empty temples of the past. The aim is to attribute to the Ottoman Turks the decadence of the glorious past of the Aegean, as if it was a Western heritage.

There are, throughout the island, many ruined fortresses and the ruins of many ancient towns to be seen. Along the coast are many excellent harbours, now long-ago made desolate by pirates. They lie everywhere without walls. Turkish pirates came to these islands with a great fleet and destroyed them completely. Samos is a ruin of buildings and columns that is impossible to describe in a single day. The Aegean is described as a world covered by a veil of deterioration. All is dark and opaque, living in the horror of the pirates and the Turks, who represent the real dangers of the shores and the risk of deterioration of the golden age of the Greek past.

Buondelmonti is a new type of writer who gets on a real boat to cross a real sea and documents his voyage, especially the real dangers of the Turks. One example, among many, of what he sees is a pulley with boat suspended on one of the Dodecanese islands. [**Fig. 8**]. On the top there is a church in a flat area. In this place, two monks worship in safety and, having made a little boat, they raise it with a rope in order to keep it safe from pirates. They were able to practice their devout prayers and regular hours without fear, day and night, and to offer up their pure libations and sacrifices. After they had pursued this ritual for a long time, «look! a Turk dressed in clothes like theirs called out with loud shouts that he was alone in a damaged boat: 'Holy men! For the love of Christ take me up, poor me, for a dreadful storm has cast our boat upon the rocks in the Greek Sea, and no one escaped but myself alone'. The monks, moved by pity, took in their guest, a new Sinon — the man who convinced the Trojans to take the wooden horse into the city — and raised him up with a rope. That night, while they were worshipping in the church, the traitor shut the door from the outside and called his comrades, hidden near the islands. They carried these servants of Christ and all their belongings away into Turkey» (Buondelmonti, ed. cit., p. 132), as slaves.

Fig.8. *Pulley with boat suspended, on the island of Kandeliousa* (Scopulus Caloriorum), in C. Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Arcipelagi*, ms. Latin 4823, fol. 23r BnF, Paris.

Some conclusions*: The pen-boat that writes-crosses the Mediterranean*

In the manner of a *new* Dantean Ulysses, the narrator-sailor of the *Genealogy* "gains experience" of the islands (*Inf.* XXVI 98), or of poetry,

first hand, on a sea-journey through the literary past and its geographical residues[37].

Nautical metaphors were common among Greek and Latin writers who often compared the composition of a work with a maritime journey, (e. g. Ov. *Fast*. I,3; II,3), highlighting that the poet-seafarer sails on a little boat, facing difficulties in a rough sea full of dangers. Boccaccio chose the metaphor of the sea-journey in the *Genealogy*, however, because it allows places to be located. Boccaccio used location less «as an analytic, descriptive concept as it was for the classical geographers, than as a tool of criticism»[38], a tool which becomes strictly functional in establishing the truth of poetry, by mapping the places mentioned by the ancient writers first in the *De montibus*, but not as a mere geographic-philological exercise. Considering that geography did not exist as a discipline in the fourteenth century, it is quite remarkable that Boccaccio emphasizes the importance «to have in one's memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains» (*Geneal*., XIV Preface, 3).

Buondelmonti shares with Boccaccio an inclination for the quality of places, for the environmental and landscape aspects where the richness of the place complements the richness of men. An exploration of the «effects of islands» becomes particularly urgent with Buondelmonti's and later Bordone's Island Books – which features the New World for the first time – since they both became artistic spaces used with geopolitical intention to colonize and dominate by means of literary islands.

Featuring the sea-journey in the Aegean, Buondelmonti's *Liber* invites readers to rethink the spatial practices adopted to describe the islands, to further unveil the goals of island books, namely their geopolitical and cultural role they played in the Mediterranocentric perspective that promotes the superiority of the West and brings about the making of the Other in a particular time of history: the Ottoman Turk in the Eastern Mediterranean before 1453. The goal was to connect the

[37] More on Boccaccio's Giovanni and Dante's Ulysses in R. Morosini (ed.), *«Insueta sulcare maria». Dal mito alla geografia. Navigare e "divenir del mondo esperto" nella Commedia e nella Genealogia deorum gentilium*, in N. Tonelli (ed.), *Il Dante di Boccaccio*, Firenze, Olschki, 2023, pp. 179-221.

[38] *Ibidem*.

Eastern and Western Mediterranean in order to save the classical past from the attacks of the Turks and to transform the ancient and pagan tradition in a shared heritage of the West, something that Ciriaco D'Ancona would continue, as Giorgio Mangani argues[39].

Buondelmonti's book became a best seller in the Renaissance. Translated from the original Latin into Greek, Italian and English, it clearly influenced Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti (1485) and Benedetto Bordoni's *Isolario* (1524) both published in the vernacular in Venice (1528), and Piri Reis' treatise on navigation in the Ottoman Mediterranean (1521-26), the *Kitab-I bahriye*.

Stories and fables are inevitable in the island book genre, stories that bring together maps, space, place, and literature, but literature takes over geography. Islands became literary spaces in a sea of paper, taken from the book of the sea, before they became pages of the book of power and oppression. When the islands of myth became the islands of the infidel Turks who posed a threat to the glorious past of the ancients, the insular space of the Aegean where Boccaccio found the philosophical «where» of civilization, they turned into 'another' space, the space of "Otherness", where the West "encompasses", to ultimately exert power over it. However, as Erri De Luca beautifully puts it in *Per l'isola*, «l'acqua ricorda, di tutto ha memoria» («water remembers, it has memory of everything»)[40].

[39] G. Mangani, *Antichità inventate. L'archeologia geopolitica di Ciriaco D'Ancona*, Milano, Mimesis Edizioni, 2017.

[40] E. De Luca, *Per l'isola*, Napoli, Dante & Descartes, 2017.