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Mapping the Mediterranean: Bartolommeo da li Sonetti and the Isolario Tradition

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Mapping the Mediterranean: Bartolommeo da li Sonetti and the *Isolario* Tradition

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

MAPPING THE MEDITERRANEAN: BARTOLOMMEO DA LI SONETTI AND THE ISOLARIO TRADITION

By Kelly M. Zacovic

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013
Major Director: Dr. Janna Israel, Associate Professor, Department of Art History

This thesis provides a detailed analysis of an Isolario, or a printed book of maps of the Aegean Islands, created in 1485 by an anonymous author called Bartolommeo da li Sonetti. Through a thorough analysis of the material properties and content of the book, this thesis seeks to revise previous scholarly interpretations of this long under-studied work of cartography. Examination of five extant copies of the 1485 Isolario and the alterations made to the pages by their owners reveals much about how the volume was consumed, read and utilized in fifteenth and sixteenth century. In opposition to previous conceptions of this work as a functional travel guide used by mariners to navigate the Aegean, this thesis argues that instead, the information contained in the book only provides superficial resemblances to functionally useful content and was instead consumed by an elite audience of ‘arm chair travellers.’
Introduction:

“Whereas historical memory was infused with myth, Venetian communal culture embraced extensive and detailed geographic knowledge, whether acquired through direct experience or at secondhand. Every traveler’s tale contributed to the city’s shared experience of the East, creating a mosaic of evocative memories of distant lands.”

As Deborah Howard indicates in her essay on Venice and the East, the tradition of maritime trade and seaport activity in early modern Venice was a shared experience. While some members of the community were away at sea for extended periods of time, others remained at home. Inevitably, the homebound were curious about their fellow Venetians’ activities at sea, and may have even craved to be part of the action. For this reason, travel literature and accounts become exceptionally popular in Venetian culture. Works in this genre created, “memories of distant lands” for those unable to form them themselves, and enabled these readers to “share in the experience of the East.” One work, which this thesis will argue falls into this ideal is the Isolario by an anonymous author who calls himself Bartolommeo da li Sonetti.

The genre of Isolario, popularized in the fifteenth century, falls within the category of portolan chart, which is a practical, working navigational map used by medieval mariners, and was an atlas of islands intended to aide navigators in their travels. The Isolario printed in 1485 by Guilelmus Anima Mia with poetic text composed by an anonymous author who identifies himself as Bartolommeo da li Sonetti is the focus of this project.

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2 Per aprobar questa operata fata/ per me bartolomeo da li Sonetti/ intend de monstrar con very effeti/ quanto che londa egiea abia cherchatta … (Final intro sonnet, lines 1-4)

Scholars have attempted to identify this pseudonym as belonging to Bartolommeo Zamberti.

3 This printer is identified by Hain’s study on the productions of printers in the Renaissance based on the years of publication and the typeface used in these years. Hain claims that the particular gothic style type of this book was only used by Anima Mia during the year that the Isolario was first published. No other record has been found more concretely identifying
li Sonetti’s *Isolario* contains 49 single page engraved maps of the islands of the Aegean, each with an accompanying sonnet, two full-page maps, and an extensive introductory and dedicatory poem. The author claims that all information contained within the book was gained through first hand experience and based on his personal knowledge.

**Method**

There are many uncertainties surrounding Sonetti’s *Isolario*, including its intended audience, how its author envisioned it being used, and even his identity. There is even indecision about its originality and contributions to literary history. Scholarship on the *Isolario* herald it as a unique contribution to the history of cartography, but as the research presented in Chapter One of this document will discuss, it is in fact rather derivative.\(^4\) Sonetti relies on textual references to the *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* from Christoforo Buondelmonti and trends in cartographic representation dating all the way back to Ptolemy. The vast wealth of knowledge that a narrowly focused case study such as this one can convey to a modern viewer about the practices of viewing, reading and collecting in early modern Venice is why this project is so important. The ways in which the text functions, or rather as it turns out, does not function, as a navigational aide also contributes to an understanding of the importance of maritime culture to both those who travelled the seas and those who remained at home.

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It is no wonder that in the sparse literature on Sonetti’s *Isolario*, there are so many uncertainties and discrepancies about its life in fifteenth century Venice. What little scholarship there is on the book is is riddled with mistranslations of the text and sweeping assumptions about its contents. These can be remedied when a careful study of the book itself is undertaken. Before drawing inferences about the work’s relationship to the socio-historical climate of fifteenth century Venice though, this project aims to establish a basic understanding of the *Isolario* through a thorough investigation of its material properties and contents, which has for so long escaped the careful attention of scholars. In order to understand the wider cultural relationships formed by this object, its contents themselves must be understood. Therefore, this project bases its investigation on the objecthood of this work in itself. A close reading of the poetic text provides insight into the motivations of its author in writing it. A detailed examination of selected extant copies reveals information about how the object was used and altered throughout its history.

What this careful investigation reveals, and what this paper will argue, is that though the book reflects accurate geographic knowledge of the Aegean and scant details about navigational practices, this work was created with a specific, but non-specialized audience in mind. The *Isolario* was created for a consumer audience of an elite nature who were eager to show off their erudition and participate in the Venetian tradition of maritime activities, if only by way of their libraries and personal studies. They were members of an audience who were active and avid collectors of the most renowned works of their times.

From the first analysis of the *Isolario* undertaken by Frederick Goff, which contains translation errors and misunderstandings about the different editions of the book, to the dubious yet prolific identification of the author as Bartolommeo Zamberti, Sonetti’s *Isolario* prompts a close examination of its many distinctive elements. Massimo Donattini makes a valid point when he mentions that the Isolario of Sonetti is much more commonly cited than

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5 For an example, see Piero Falchetta’s essay in *Navigare e Descrivere: Isolari e Portolani del Museo Correr di Venezia : XV-XVIII Secolo*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2001 pp 45-47.
studied and it deserves a careful examination. This thesis seeks to contribute to the scholarship on early modern conceptions of mapmaking by redressing the earlier misconceptions about the text and of the *Isolario* in the context of early printed books on cartography.
Chapter 1: History of the Isolario and Cartography

This chapter will outline a literary genealogy of the island book, making apparent the wealth of resources from which Sonetti drew his inspiration. In order to better understand the socio-political background motivating the production of a book of islands of the Aegean Sea in the Fifteenth century, this chapter will also outline a brief maritime history of the Republic of Venice.

The History of A Genre

The *Isolario* of da li Sonetti represents an original contribution to the field of cartography and the first printed volume in the Isolario tradition, but it is not without its predecessors, nor was the Isolario of Sonetti the last of its kind. Massimo Donattini references at least fifteen isolarii published between the years 1420 and 1703, starting with the *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* by Cristoforo Buondelmonti in 1420 and with the genre appearing until the last of its kind, Olfert Dapper’s *Description exacte des Isles de l’Archipel*, published in 1703.⁶

The 1420 *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* may be the first distinctly categorized and self-aware book of islands, but the lineage of travel writing can be traced back at least to Homer’s *Odyssey*. The story of the travels of Odysseus and the detailed account of landscapes that Homer provides represents an early prefiguration of the navigational and literary tradition that Sonetti embarks upon 2300 years later. Besides covering similar territory of the Greek Peloponnese, for example the Ionian Islands as well as Crete and

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Corfu Odysseus’s tale similarly follows a rigorous, even if potentially imaginary itinerary through the region while describing the habit and customs of the people he encountered there.

Greek history after Homer continues to record a long-standing tradition of travel writing that focused on ethnographic and geographic reporting grounded in the authority of first hand observation. During the 2nd century CE, we encounter an ideal representative of this tradition and an important figure in the historiography of the island book, the Greek traveler and geographer, Pausanius, who wrote a ten volume book Description of Greece in prose. These books describe the islands of the Archipelago based on first hand observations. Similar to the Sonetti Isolario, Description of Greece is organized geographically, as it follows the path of the author’s tour of the region (Fig. 1). More than merely a topographical exposition, Pausanias’s books try to glean an understanding of the culture of the places he portrays, distilling information on architecture, art objects, mythology and historical landmarks and stories, into one of the first examples of cultural geography, a field within which all isolarii can be well considered to fall.

In order to understand the relationship between Pausanius’s writing and Sonetti’s, it would be beneficial to here define cultural geography. Cultural Geography is defined as “the study of cultural products and norms and their variations across and relations to spaces and places”.

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place to another and on explaining how humans function spatially. For example, these two passages from *Description of Greece* and *Isolario* demonstrate how these works fall within this category.

As you leave Pheneos towards the west, the left road leads to Kleitor, and on the right is the road to Nonakris and the water of the Styx. In ancient times Nonakris was a town of the Arkadians, named after the wife of Lyakon, but in our times it is in ruins, and most of these are hidden. Not far from the ruins is a high cliff: I know of no other that reaches such a height. A water trickles down the cliff, and the Greeks call it the water of the Styx. (Paus. 8.17.6)

Icarus already fell over this place
With the flight from Crete ending here
Because Apollo heated the pitch too much
This is what the father Daedalus contested
But here Varrone gives rise to other intelligence
That Icarus passed well in that place
This was the power of Icaria
This island is long straight and rocky
And without ports and poor disembarkments
That is rocky almost all the way around
At the top of the mountain two castles appear
With good apples and copius wine
To the east is a tower near the sea
70 miles around
From this platform you see first Dragonere
(Sonetti, Per Nicaria)

As can be seen from these two examples, the reports made by both Pausanias and Sonetti are decidedly focused on these elements. Pausanias mixes a description of the topography of the region with a brief history of the place and how it got its name. The Sonetti passage similarly blends an etymology of the island name with information about its geography and inhabitants. The Pausanias account though, is much more specific. Its description of the destinations reached by taking the roads described would actually
benefit a traveller. The description of Namphio, on the other hand, contains geographical information, but not specifics that would help someone find their way.

Liber Insularum Archipelagi

In Early Modern Florence, a monk, Cristoforo Buondelmonti, born in 1386, embarked on a journey across the Aegean, alighting in Constantinople, where he wrote his, *Liber Insularum Archipelagi*. This atlas of 79 sites in the Greek archipelago is accompanied by descriptive prose that was informed by the common thread that runs through these works, first hand observation, in addition to heavy reliance on antique sources.9

The *Liber* was produced in manuscript form with prose text describing each location through histories, mythologies, classical reminiscences, epigraphs and glimpses of the role of the islands in the spread of Christianity. The monk executed a hand drawn illustration (Fig. 2) to accompany each description, depicting some facet of the information relayed in the text, not always being cartographic in nature. The descriptions provided in the *Liber* begin the trend of what Donattini calls the “crystallization” of Greece; a carefully constructed style of reporting that seems to remove the account, and therefore the location, from time. These crystallized tales report myth, ancient history and contemporary happenings side by side in such a way that all sense of time is suspended and the reader can imagine this place being preserved in all of its glory for eternity.10 The more than one hundred copies that still remain in archives around the world attest to the

9 Buondelmonti was part of the Florentine humanist circle and a close companion to Niccolò Niccoli, the owner of a copy of the Pausanias account. Robert Weiss, “Cristoforo Buondelmonti” accessed January 4, 2013, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cristoforo-buondelmonti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

popularity and prevalence of the manuscript. It would seem that this new genre struck a chord with its contemporary humanist audience, responding to the movement’s deep curiosity to establish contact with the golden past, which was lost for so long.

The text of the Isolario of Sonetti very closely parallels that of Buondelmonti’s Liber. The islands follow the same orientation; their accounts report similar episodes, cite similar authorities and Sonetti even reproduces the same errors of his predecessor. What Sonetti did was simplify and make elegant, lyrical and most importantly, legible the prose of Buondelmonti by translating the Latin into his vernacular Italian sonnets.

Though exceptionally similar, the individual interests of each respective author colored their reporting and gave their works their own unique twist. Buondelmonti was a humanist monk, motivated in his travels through a desire to experience the lands, research the customs and see the landmarks of this lauded ancient civilization. Therefore, his reports are solidly rooted in the terra firma and are motivated by an inclination towards cultural anthropology and archaeology. Sonetti, on the other hand, was an active mariner with an interest in the humanist learning of his time. His profession then, accounts for the seaward leanings of his sonnets, which analyze the islands from the coast inland, each include precise measurements of island circumferences, relational distances between neighboring islands, and aquatic hazards, in addition to their socio-historical account.

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11 Donattini, 215.

12 For example, both authors refer to the island of Lipso (Lipsi) as Dipso and mistakenly attribute information in their passages on Naxos as stemming from Ovid, which in actuality came from Pliny. Donattini, 215-216

13 “That from the east the port is sua clisia/ And around it is about 20 miles” Per Halki e Livadia 18-19

14 “The island of Rhodes will be left here/ And west the captain went/ For about 30 miles or a little more/ I found the islands of the Symie” Per le Symi 1-5
Francesco Berlingheri and the Geographia

In his book *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople and the Renaissance of Geography*, Sean Roberts examines another important literary and cartographic antecedent to the *Isolario* of Sonetti. Francesco Berlingheri’s 1482-printed book *Geographia* is an importance representative of the Renaissance cultures of geography, cartography, literature and diplomacy. The *Geographia* is a Florentine book consisting of over one hundred folio leaves describing the world according to Ptolemy in Italian verse interspersed with engraved maps of the depicted places. Like the verses of the Sonetti book, Berlingheri’s poetry tells the story of the world through a mixture of classical history and contemporary travel accounts while filling in the gaps in information left from Ptolemy’s merely basic descriptions of place name and coordinate orientation with contemporary geographic knowledge. Beyond its existence as an illustrative and descriptive geographic work, *Geographia* also performed a diplomatic duty, as it was presented as a gift from the Florentines to the Ottoman Empire. Roberts examines this Renaissance book as an emblem of the culture that situates it in order to better understand the early modern culture of geography, the popularity of the work and why it was considered a worthy gift to such a respected political envoy. For this reason, it has been greatly influential to this thesis and is frequently used throughout.

Would Sonetti have been aware of Berlingheri’s work? And would the popularity and commercial success of *Geographia* have influenced his decisions about the form and structure of his own poetic atlas book? It is hard to imagine that he would have been oblivious to its existence, for it was a point of pride in the libraries of Italy’s most

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esteemed scholars, statesmen and collectors. The Isolario is clearly derived from the same tradition.

Geographia does not stand alone as a vernacular lyrical predecessor to the Isolario. Florentine author Fazio Degli Uberti published his Dittamondo, a poem in terza rima that describes the author’s journey throughout the whole world in the mid-fourteenth century. Even earlier in the fourteenth century, Gregorio Dati penned La Sfera, which provided yet another vernacular verse source for geographic description. These sources much more closely parallel Berlingheri’s work than Sonetti’s in their literary forms and narratives, but when viewed as a group, provide convincing evidence of a tradition of successful and popular Renaissance poetic geographic accounts.

Of the fifteen isolarii that Massimo Donattini claims were created between the 15th and 18th centuries, eight of these were composed during the height of the age of discovery, during the 15th and 16th centuries. It may not be surprising that the major part of the isolari published between the 15th and 17th centuries were Venetian. Ten of these focused strictly on the limited geographic scope of the Aegean. For example, after the publication of the Sonetti text, the archipelago tradition is returned to, more than a century later, with a publication by another Venetian, Antonio Millo in his manuscript Isolario from 1590, then Francesco Lupazolo’s Isolario dell’Archipelago in 1638 and the famous Archipelago from Marco Boschini, edited in 1658, also in Venice. This leaves five Isolarii that took on a more ambitious, or global, scope. These books, which include most notably, Benedetto...

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16 Roberts, 61-63 Both La Sfera and Dittamondo are rudimentarily illustrated in a cosmographic style that has little bearing on factual geographic representation.

17 The poems of Berlingheri, Uberti and Dati, are all Florentine in origin and share as a common literary source Dante’s Commedia. In each, the geographer is transported on their journey by a shade of a Classical geographical authority, just as Virgil guided Dante through the Underworld. Dati and Uberti’s works are of special significance because they provide their later imitators with the vernacular place names of the locations mentioned by Ptolemy. Roberts, 61-63

18 Donattini, 183.
Bordone’s *Libro di tutte le isole del mondo* from 1528, were published in the years between the first popular emergence of the genre after 1485 and the reappearance of the archipelago tradition in the 1590’s.

The trend of the departure from, then return to, the original formula established by Buondelmonti and Sonetti diagrams like a parabola that points to the interests of their audience and also provides a hint at the purposes for which these items were being consumed. According to Donattini, the genre of isolarii was born at the intersection of the humanist age and the age of discovery, describing overtly humanistic places by relating their history and mythology in order to underline their centrality to classical civilization and the link between contemporary society and their beloved past civilization. The return in the late 16th century then, reads as symptomatic of decadence, or nostalgia for “a dying thalassocracy,” for maritime dominion. 19

A Venetian Tradition

Frederic Chapin Lane in *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, attributes the modernization of cartography in Venice to intellectual trends that the efforts of three men: a friar, a nobleman and a Genoese maritime chart maker embodied. 20 Inspired by Marco Polo’s return from China, the friar, Fra Paolino, advocated that the increasingly popular genre of travel literature and geographic description were not by themselves sufficient representations of the world and needed to be supplemented by maps and pictures. 21 Maps became an integral part of the didactic nature of these travel reports. Their readers could

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19 Donattini, 182. Ibid.


21 This concept can be seen in the tradition of Ptolemy, though only known second hand at this time, who advocated for a unification of “theory and practice” in geography. For more on this, see Roberts, *Printing a Mediterranean World*
look for support for what they were reading in the maps that accompanied the reports. These abstract textual reports of strange places were made more concrete and believable through the visual evidence of maps. Following his own directive, a “world map” that showed Asia, Africa and Europe accompanied Paolino’s treatise on cartography, *De Mappa Mundi* (1330).

Before this influx of empirical evidence in topographical and geographic information that were the product of the Age of Discovery, maps were largely based on the writings of Ptolemy. The most important work of this ancient Roman geographer, written in 150 CE and “rediscovered” in Italy at the end of the 14th century, is his *Geographia*. This was the first discovered work to list locations of the whole inhabited world including all the Roman provinces and explain geography through the system of latitude and longitude based on celestial observations. Ptolemy’s geography is based on what was known about the world as a result of Roman expansion. The work only describes about a quarter of world and is riddled with incorrect assumptions about landmass shapes and errors in the reporting of most water features, but it was highly valued in the Renaissance for the geometric understanding of the Earth that it proposed. *Geographia* was the basis for the rationalization of the globe that also contributed to the advancement of astronomy, and physics, not only geography and cartography.

After the Age of Exploration, the Ptolemaic cosmography was no longer able to compete with the new geographic and anthropological information brought back from the

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22 The actual text of the *Geography* appears to be unknown to the Western world until the last decade of the 14th century. The knowledge of its contents was only a shadow of the real contents and the images that accompanied it were entirely unknown. Ptolemy’s work was known first hand by the Byzantine Greeks and Ottomans, for whom the tract remained a commonly accessible document. The text was “rediscovered” for Europeans in Constantinople’s monastery of the Chora and first brought to the continent by Manuel Chrysoloras, a scholar in the hire of Florentine patrician and patron, Palla Strozzi. Roberts, 20-22.
numerous explorations during these centuries. For example, in a passage from *Geographia*, Ptolemy writes “In the middle of the Mediterranean Sea there are the islands of Cypress, Sicily, and Sardegna, so also is the whole of the earth in the middle of the ample width of the ocean, although for its magnitude it is called a continent, i.e. land.”

With Europeans rapidly coming to know more about the world than their ancient predecessors, maps based on *Geographia* and other forms, such as the T-O map were outdated. The maps of Paolino and his contemporaries were the first that began to reflect a departure from the ancient cartographic tradition. Paolino depicted the eastern edge of China and the Caspian Sea, both previously unrecorded and he also strayed from the common tendency of medieval maps to give extra attention to sites such as the Garden of Eden and Jerusalem. It is obvious that the Isolario tradition falls under the influence of Fra Paolino’s directive to assimilate text and image to describe the world. As has been mentioned and will be discussed in further detail later, neither Sonetti’s maps, nor his sonnets are able to communicate a complete picture of the islands on their own.

A few years after Paolino published his Mappa Mundi, the Venetian nobleman Marino Sanudo the Elder, called Torsello, called for a Crusade to oust Muslims from the western-most reaches of the Venetian empire. He accompanied his proposition to the pope with five portolan charts drawn by the Genoese mapmaker Pietro Vesconti and a revised world map created by Paolino and Sanudo together. The portolans are remarkable for their incredible standardization and accuracy, and the new world map shows corrections to

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23 Ptolemy, *La Geografia*. Venice, by G.B. Pedrezano, 1548. This excerpt was used by Tommasso Porcacchi in the *proemio* of his Isolario, *L’Isol Piu Famose Del Mondo* from 1604.

24 Lane, 277

the boundaries of the Mediterranean that display the most up to date findings from traders and explorers.26

Into the 15th fifteenth century, more accurate maps were being produced by Venetian citizens, the most remarkable of which is Fra Mauro’s *Mappa Mundi* (Fig. 3) from around 1450. This Camaldolite friar and cartographer had at his disposal a vast library of scholarly texts and contemporary travel reports and maritime maps, which he used to create his work.27 He had access to the contents of the library at the monastery of St Michael of Murano where he worked and resided as well as the recently donated library of Cardinal Bessarion. Both of these included examples of the wide diffusion of accounts of Venetian exploration such as that of Niccolò de Conti from 1444 and of Marco Polo’s from the thirteenth century, among numerous other anonymous geographic and travel narratives.28

Mauro produced many maps, but the Mappa Mundi from the 1450’s is by far his most ambitious and famous work. Prince Peter of Portugal, as a gift for his brother Henry the Navigator, commissioned it.29 Peter recognized in Mauro’s earlier maps a much larger extent of knowledge about the southern parts of Africa, both of the interior and coastal regions of the continent, and therefore had the map made to aid his brother’s exploration. Mauro’s map is an embodiment of Paolino’s ideas about the importance of the coexistence of textual description and image in a cartographic work. The map is covered by inscriptions describing locations that are informed by a balance of information from Ptolemy, Marco Polo, Arabic cartography and oral accounts of the world from travellers.

26 Lane heralds this map as “the best compilation of geographical knowledge yet made in the west.”


28 ibid.

29 Lane, 278
What make these inscriptions particularly remarkable are the judgments that Mauro made in weighing certain accounts and sources over others to rely on to inform his actual cartography and the descriptions of it that he provides. For example, of Ptolemy, Mauro writes:

I do not think it derogatory to Ptolemy if I do not follow his Cosmografia, because, to have observed his meridians or parallels or degrees, it would be necessary in respect to the setting out of the known parts of this circumference, to leave out many provinces not mentioned by Ptolemy. But principally in latitude, that is from south to north, he has much 'terra incognita', because in his time it was unknown. It is clear from his writing that, though he roots his map in Ptolemaic tradition, he recognizes the need to append it and privileges empiricism based on his contemporary explorers as much as the ancient authority.

When examining Fra Mauro’s map and the Isolario together, one can see that though they are very different, they also have many common threads uniting them. Fra Mauro himself never travelled far from the Venetian lagoon, but many of the descriptions on his map read like first-hand travel accounts. Sonetti’s work, of course was also constructed under the premise of being exactly that, a personal travel record. Neither Sonetti nor Mauro though, are content to simply reproduce empirical travel tales. Throughout both accounts are woven details about classical history and anecdotes of mythology and legend.

It is important to recognize that the text on the mappa mundi is written in the vernacular Venetian dialect, the same as Sonetti uses for his sonnets. Cattaneo claims that the Venetian vernacular was an international language during the fifteenth century, a lingua franca of culture and trade common to Europeans, Byzantine and Slavic Easterners.

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31 Translation of text found on the 1450 Mappa Mundi by Mauro, translated by Angelo Cattaneo and found in *Fra Mauro’s Mappa Mundi and Fifteenth-Century Venice*
and Africans. This linguistic choice allows for a significantly larger consumer audience for the works. Unlike other early modern map and travel literature which were written in Latin such as the Buondelmonti Isolario for example, these vernacular texts reflect a desire to appear as if they were used to aid navigators and the less erudite sailors.

Because Fra Mauro’s map was intended as a functional object, his representational choice to make the map a combination of text and image derived from both ancient and contemporary sources must be understood as that which was perceived to best assist the map’s viewer in understanding its contents. Because it was commissioned for a royal patron’s use, this choice must also be understood as one that would most appeal to a scholarly and regal navigator.

If Sonetti’s work is seen as responding in any way to the tradition of the works in the cartographic genre that came before his own, the connections that can be drawn between Mauro’s *Mappa Mundi* and the *Isolario* may indicate that Sonetti was consciously fashioning his atlas to appear be a functional guide. This tactic would have given the work many commercial advantages such as lending it credibility and capitalizing on a genre that had become popular in the maritime republic. Sonetti, while creating a unique work that breaks free from many traditions, is also clearly influenced by and responds to contemporary intellectual trends and undercurrents within the realm of cartography.

In this section, I have demonstrated that ways in which it is obvious that Sonetti is responding to the cartographic traditions that were in places during his life. He took the best and most compelling elements from the likes of Buondelmonti, Mauro, Ptolemy and

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32 Cattaneo, 232-233
other influential figures active in formulating an epistemology of geography in the Renaissance. Sonetti’s identity may not be known, but it is obvious that he is both a learned scholar and capable mariner.

_Proficium et Honorem:_ The Republic and her Relationship with the Sea

Profit and pride, _proficium et honorem_, equally motivated the longstanding relationship between Venice and the sea. Not only did the Republic take advantage of its natural bond to the water to build a powerful economy, but it also celebrated its territorial acquisitions and each new island was a point of pride. Venice’s relationship with the sea was an integral part of its early history. Less than a century after its inception, the city was establishing its maritime might by battling encroaching pirates and helping the Byzantine forces drive out Arabs from Crete and Cyprus. The Republic continued to increase its clout during the Middle Ages, taking advantage of its position as a gateway to the East for European trade. The Crusades were a major outlet for political and territorial gain. The economic and material assistance from Doge Vital I Michele during the First Crusade earned the Republic nearly complete control of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Venice gained much of its foothold in the Aegean during its involvement in the Fourth Crusade. The Republic assisted in transporting the crusaders, and in return, after the sack of Constantinople in 1204, claimed many of the spoils, including the horses from the famous bronze quadriga that sat atop St. Mark’s Basilica for so many centuries, as well as a significant portion of the Byzantine Empire’s territorial holdings in the Aegean, including Crete and Negroponte—both depicted by Sonetti.

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In the years following the gain of these territories, which came to include most of the Cyclades, Corfu, Cyprus, Rhodes, the Ionian islands and the southern half of the Greek mainland, among other islands, Venetians established a system of colonial government referred to as the Duchy of the Archipelago, or, in the larger political scheme of Venice, the Stato da Mar. This political organization also encompassed territories on the Dalmatian coast and in the Mediterranean.\(^{35}\) Sonetti’s *Isolario* treats a large portion of the holdings of the Stato da Mar, including Cyprus, Rhodes, most of the Ionian Islands and the Cyclades and much of the Dodecanese chain and makes mention of the Venetian involvement with the region when relevant.

From the Stato da Mar, Venice sought food, manpower, and raw materials as well as an outlet for visual and territorial projections of power.\(^{36}\) Most importantly, the city sought a route that would guarantee the safe passage of her merchant ships to the east and back to their homeport. They formed a highway-like trade route through which Venetian merchant ships could travel that included convenient and safe stopping places to stock up on food, supplies and rest, and allowed for a strategically placed naval presence that would combat the ever-present risk of plundering by pirates and invasion by the Ottomans.

Besides protecting convenient maritime routes, the Duchy of the Archipelago provided many of the goods and services that were unavailable to the citizens of the lagoon city, who were compelled to import everything they needed from the sea. Raisins,

\(^{35}\) Crowley, 231-251

\(^{36}\) Nearly every island that Venice controlled had a Church of San Marco, often mimicking a scaled down version of the Venetian original. Buildings constructed in these Aegean territories during Venetian governance also mimicked that of the lagoon city. The Venetian monetary unit was the standard currency across the Aegean in this period. Since each coin carried an image of the doge and other symbols of Venice, each monetary transaction would be a reminder of this ruling force.
olive oil and wine were important exports from the Ionian Islands and Corfu. Crete provided wheat, hard cheese, wax, honey, wine and wood, and quickly became a center for shipbuilding for the Republic. Other islands, such as Paros (Pario for Sonetti) and the Cyclades were renowned for providing beautiful marble. The Cyclades also produced wine, wood, and salt in Milos as well as wheat. Silkworms were raised on Andros and the raw material was spun on Tinos and Kea. Other recorded imported products from this island chain include oil, cheese, wool, rice, lambskin, cotton, wax and sponges. Native inhabitants of these islands provided the manpower to row the Venetian fleets and fight any imposing enemies.\textsuperscript{37} The poems of Sonetti’s \textit{Isolario} commonly echo these facts, remarking, as he does in his sonnet for Icaria, famous for its wine, “At the top of the mountain two castles appear/ with good apples and copious wine”\textsuperscript{38} and in his sonnet for Paros, “[it has] good ports and is well appointed/ with water and fruit and every good supply. / …The marble born here dominates…”\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} Crowley, 231-251

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Per Icaria}, 12-13

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Per Pario}, 3-5
Chapter 2: The Book

In this chapter, I will describe the formal characteristics of this book, supported by first hand observation of six individual copies and discuss how these properties lend an overall understanding of the previously ambiguous role of this book in Early Modern Venice.

The Isolario was originally published in 1485, in a volume comprised solely solely the poetic texts opposite of charts that were illustrated with major monuments and a basic indication of terrain. A second edition though, was published in 1532, with the addition of a map created by Francesco Roselli. This addition is likely the only alteration made to the 1485 edition. No place names were printed nor were the prints colored. As this chapter will demonstrate, on several of the copies that remain today though, there exist post-production alterations to the original edition. Place names are occasionally hand written on to the maps in Latin, Italian, or in one instance Spanish and several copies show indications of hand coloring.

The book is comprised of 112 unnumbered pages, 72 sonnets and 49 maps describing 46 places. The islands described by Sonetti are all part of the island chains of Aegean, including the Cyclades, the Sporades, the Dodecanese and the Venetian territories of Crete and Cyprus. This is important because it shows the extent of the locations covered in the book. The book begins with a five page, 139-line proemio with the addition of two extra sonnets, which starts with a cryptic three-line dedication including

an elaborate numerical acrostic with a dedication to Doge Giovanni Mocenigo. The sonnets for each individual island follow, alternating between poem and map, (Fig. 4) with the former appearing on the back of the page, the latter on the front, making it easier for the reader to check the information in the text against that of the map without having to turn pages. There are surprisingly few exceptions to this pattern. However, the map of Crete (Fig. 5) spreads across two pages, as does that of Negroponte (Fig. 34), now called Euboea, each with more sonnets than the others (eight for Crete, three for Negroponte.) Some of the smaller islands are combined two to a page, with the landmasses appearing together on the facing map, as is the case for the first two island sonnets of Cythera and Cerigotto.

Formal Analysis:

Every map has an island or group of islands inscribed within a compass circle that is divided into eight sections, corresponding to the principle directions of the wind. The islands are described through a thin wood-cut line representing the outline of their coastal boundaries (Fig. 6), with few other aquatic elements indicated. Within the inscribed coastal boundaries, the figuration is reduced to symbolic images that indicate very generally the presence of large cities, castles, the major mountains and rivers (Fig. 6c) and simplified tree shapes to indicate the location of forests that are easily legible and comprehensible. The indicators of aquatic topography that are included on these charts are standard symbols for shoals, reefs and shallow waters present on many nautical charts.

Shallow waters are indicated by closely grouped small dots (Fig. 6b), while reefs or other

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\( ^{41} \) Al Divo Cinquecento cinque e diece
Tre Cinque a dò Mil nulla tre e dò un cento
Nulla questa opra dar piú ch’a altri lecce
The highlighted text, when transcribed into roman or arabic numerals translated into DVeX ZVaN MOZNeICO, Dux Zuan Mozenico.
submerged hazards for ships are also indicated in somewhat of a flower shape, with the peak of the hazard located in a round circle, a tapering off in half moon or petal shape (Fig. 6a).

The Isolario is very carefully and thoughtfully organized based on the geography of the region. The account starts with the island of Cythera, which sits at the entryway to the Aegean to the west. From there, the Isolario winds from south to north and snakes from west to east and back again, leaving no island, no matter how small or uninhabited, unmentioned.42 This clearly established order, based on the actual geography of the region, coupled with the specific details about circumferences and distance relationships makes apparent Sonetti’s direct familiarity with the region. The author has at his disposal a clear understanding of the region, like a mental map (and likely a paper map as well) that allows him to lay out his book in the same way a navigator might plan his route.

The way in which Sonetti uses these common nautical and cartographic symbols (for which he provides no key, indicating an assumption that these are universally understood by his audience) and orients his islands within a directional rose firmly root the charts within the navigational tradition. It is almost as if each page is an extreme magnification of a complete chart of the Aegean that could be assembled into a cohesive whole if removed from the book’s binding.

On Copies Seen First Hand

In order to better understand the ways in which this book was used by its audience, I attempted to examine as many copies as possible with my own eyes, looking for alterations made to the text, signs of wear that speak to its use or records of provenance that would indicate the type of buyer to whom this work appealed. In the course of this

42 Donattini, 208
study, I have analyzed copies at the Boston Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library and the Library of Congress.

The copy of the *Isolario* seen at the Boston Public Library is of special importance to this project. This copy aligns with the standard form of these books, being in quarto form, measuring 235 x 170 mm, printed on sturdy paper and is uncolored. It is bound in a modern binding of blue morocco leather with the title of the work embossed in gold on its spine. This copy, though, is important because added to its charts are post-production handwritten place names. The most beneficial things that came out of having access to this particular copy were the notes that the library had compiled on the *Isolario* that are otherwise unpublished.

These notes contained information from how the book came into the library’s collection to a formal analysis of the book itself and even an explanation of the scale and measurements used to calculate and draw the maps. The *Isolario* came to the BPL as part of the Bowditch Collection, which was the personal library of 18th century navigator, Nathaniel Bowditch. The identification of Gulielmus Anima Mia as the printer of this volume is discussed in these notes. They claim that despite there being no indication of a printer contained within the text and no record of a petition for privilege being applied for, this work can be attributed to Anima Mia based on the particular gothic typeface used, which was particular to his workshop during the mid 1480’s. The library notes decode the initials that mark the compass directions on the chart, pointing out that they correspond to the name of the wind that governs a particular direction. North is indicated by an arrow, east is represented by a cross, indicating the direction of the birthplace of Christianity,
northeast is a G for the wind Greco, S is for Sirocco, the southeast wind, O indicates South, A is Southwest for Africo, and P is west for Ponente.  

Interestingly, these notes discuss the scale used in this book. The author of these notes points out that the graphic scale used on the charts is of a type that he calls “ribbon like” (Fig. 7). What this may indicate is that the device used to measure the distances represented may have been the antiquated tape measuring system instead of the use of a compass. There is no discussion of how this conclusion is reached, but it may be derived from the appearance of the scales as having knots, relating to a medieval system of rope measure. The actual measurement of scale that the charts conform to (which Sonetti refers to as *milla*) does not match any other unit of measure, and is thus referred to as the “portolan mile.” One portolan mile equals 5900 meters. A.E. Nordenskiöld, in his work *Periplus* from 1897 made this calculation and also determined that the average scale division for these charts is equal to 6’28”, which is almost exactly equal to one portolan mile, or half scale division.

On the maps themselves, an owner of the book has taken it upon themselves to add in their own hand the names of cities, towns, mountains and monasteries, among other landmarks. On the major maps, such as for Crete (Fig. 8), nearly each drawn landmark is identified by name. Included among these are places both cited and not cited in the accompanying poem. On the map for *Stampalia and Conupi and Many Little Islands*, (Fig. 9) the largest landmass drawn is Stampalia itself, but the chart also depicts at least 16 other islands surrounding it, which our scribe has carefully named, a task that Sonetti himself does not undertake in his poem. The most extensive addition to a map is found on

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43 Library notes, Boston Public Library, anonymous author

44 ibid.
the second to last map of the book, *Damala sete poci e altre insule* (Fig. 10) where a four-line epigram is written in Latin. The manner in which the place names are added onto these maps mimics the tradition of portolan charts, in which in which the words are not uniformly oriented, instead being printed in relation to the direction that the map would have been held to navigate that region. The additions are often upside down or at right angles to the standard page orientation, indicating that the owner may have been thinking of these places in real space, shifting his hold on the book as he imagined circumnavigating an island (Fig. 9a).

Some of the additions made address the issue of the lack of spatial contextualization in the charts, adding in “Asia Minore” or “Constantinople” at the edge of the page to indicate the direction these places can be found (Fig. 11). This closely imitates a trope that Benedetto Bordone uses frequently in his *Isolario* to help orient the viewer (Fig. 12). It seems as though, then, that the owner of this copy was familiar with the Bordone maps and found this detail to be a useful improvement on the strategies employed by Sonetti’s maps. Bordone’s maps also contain place names inscribed near the location named.

In several cases, the owner draws his own landmarks on the islands, when he finds Sonetti’s lacking. On the map for the island of Sipbano (Fig. 13, 13a), he draws in a castle and labels it “Parniaio”. On the dual page map for Negroponte (Fig. 14, 14a), the owner drew in a cityscape of Athens and another small architectural structure near the southeastern coast. Also on this map, he added another island altogether, which is labeled Caodovo. Besides these types of additions to the maps that I have listed, this copy shows
no evidence of other post-production alterations, and there are no marks made in relation to the poems.

The Library of Congress holds two copies of the 1485 edition of Sonetti’s *Isolario*. The first to be discussed is part of the Rosenwald collection, which was given to the LOC by Sears Roebuck chairman Lessing Rosenwald in 1943. Similar in size to the BPL copy, the LOC records the measurement of its height to be 23.8 cm. It is bound in brown leather on sturdy paper bearing no watermark or plate marks or impressions, with additional modern pages added to the end that bear the watermark of “J Waterman Turkey Mill 1834.” From these, it may be presumed that that is the date and binder of the volume in its present state. This copy seems to be in nearly the same state as it was when originally published, with the only alterations being the addition of two small pointing hands drawn adjacent to two selections of text. 45

The second copy at the LOC by a few more details that make it interesting to dissect. It is again of the same size, records indicating that it is 24 cm high and is bound with a leather cover that is closed with metal clasps. There is no indication of when this binding was added, but due to its deteriorating condition, it is older than any of the other bindings so far seen. Unlike the other copies, the pages contain a geometric watermark. Affixed to the interior of the front cover was a bookplate for the Bibliotheca Sobolewskiana, the private library of Sergej Alexandrowitsch Sobolewski (1803-1870), a bibliophile who assembled an extensive library of literature on travel and cartography. In addition to this bookplate (Fig. 15), a sheet of paper with handwritten notes on the work

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45 A hand was drawn next to the first tercet of the final sonnet of the introduction. “Quindece volte intuirem son statto/ officiale e poi patrone in nave/ merce di mei signor che onor ma fatto. The second hand was drawn adjacent to the last two lines of the sonnet for Scarpanto. “A chi volese tor moliere aprova/ Si fata vranza a stinsula le trova”
that cataloged the selling price of the volume at its last four transactions was included. None of the dates of these sales are indicated. The first price recorded was 80 francs, the second 96 francs, the third, 257 francs and final record says it was sold for £650. With this list of sale prices was included this information: “the earliest atlas of the Mediterranean and an early specimen of poetry in Italian. The date should be before 1480 as the cryptogram at the beginning gives the name of the reigning doge C. Mocinego who ruled from 1477 to 1485.”

Any owner of this particular copy did not make any additions or alterations to the maps of this volume, but they did make numerous cryptic notes next to the lines of poetry. These notes are in the form of a variety of symbols whose meaning is as of yet unfamiliar to me (Figs. 16, 17, 18). To the right of the eighth line on the first page, is a long horizontal S shape with two dots flanking the top and bottom of it. Next to the tenth line on the same page is a flower symbol. These two shapes appear separately or together next to twenty lines of the poem from the introduction through the 4th Sonnet for Crete. Though I have not yet made sense of this system of signification, the impression that they lend is one of literary relevance, as if their writer was breaking down the literary conventions of the poems. They seem to have little to do with any geographical interests on the part of their marker, so they support the notion of the volume’s consumption as a luxury object instead of a practical one.

The Pierpont Morgan Library holds two copies of the Isolario, both unlike any of the others I have seen that are here discussed.

The first copy to come into the possession of the Morgan Library came into the collection in 1902 with Morgan’s purchase of Richard Bennett’s collection of illuminated
manuscripts. Throughout the book, there are several pieces of evidence that allow a tracing of its provenance. A stamp on the inside of the front cover indicates that the book came to Bennett as part of William Morris’s personal collection. Above the first line of the poem is handwritten what appears to be “Bibliotheque de Mello”, indicating that it came first from the collection of François-Alexandre Seillière, a French industrialist, art and book collector of the early 19th century. It is bound in contemporary brown morocco leather with tooling and closes with clasps, very similar to one of the copies from the Library of Congress. It appears in very good condition with little staining or tears in the paper. This paper bears no watermarks.

What makes the Bennett collection copy so valuable to this study is the extensive amount of personalization that it demonstrates. Each chart of the book is completely hand colored. The water is colored blue, the ribbon scale and all buildings, a burnt orange color, and the islands, a variety of colors including green, beige, pink, and light orange (Fig. 19). All the islands on a page are colored the same shade, but they differ from page to page. The type of the pigment used is unknown and it appears to vary throughout the book. The green and blue shades are watercolor like in nature, as they have seeped into the paper, giving it the characteristic stained appearance. The beige, pink and especially burnt orange colors are more viscous, sitting atop the paper and having an almost waxy sheen to them (Fig. 20). They being of a more viscous coloring substance is confirmed by the presence of a hair trapped into the beige paint on the chart for Nicsia (Fig. 21).

The coloration completely fills the page, with all the space representing water colored blue, and the islands entirely filled in with their colors, but the shapes are not meticulously filled in, sometimes going outside of the lines, sometimes not filling them
entirely and the color is not artistically applied. The coloration of the buildings is not precise; with the burnt orange being applied more or less overtop of the illustration in roughly a dot shape. There is no color added to the indications of topographical or vegetal features.

This copy does show handwritten additions to its text and maps, but unlike the BPL copy and the second Morgan copy, individual place names are not added to the charts. As previously mentioned, above the dedicatory introduction is hand written “Bibliotheque de Mello” and under the text on this first page is written “Autore: Bartolommeo Dalli Sonetti.” These are the only examples of additions made to the texts. On several of the maps, generally on the bottom center of the page, there are handwritten words and phrases that are illegible and unintelligible to my eyes.

The second copy that the Morgan Library possesses came into the collection in 1954. Beyond the dollar amount, which may be presumed to be its’ purchasing price of “$2500” written onto the inside cover, there is little other information on its provenance. It is bound in 19th century embossed calfskin and in good condition.

This copy is also hand colored, but in a very different manner from the Bennett collection copy. The color is applied much more artfully in distinctly watercolor pigments so that the charts are very aesthetically pleasing (Fig. 22). On the outside of the printed lines, the colorist traced the coast in a thin blue line, on the interior of the islands, a beige outline. The buildings are red with the color applied faithfully to the outline of the symbol, and the trees and indications of topography are green.

This copy has the most extensive hand written additions made to it of any that I have seen. In the right margin of the last page of the introductory text is written “Soneto
del numero de le isole e de i scogli et seche.” (Sonnet of the number of the islands and of the rocks) Adjacent to the sonnet where Sonetti names himself is written “soneto de che a fato lopera et iche modo.” (Sonnet of who made the work and in what manner) This manner of summary notation doesn’t continue outside of the introductory poem, but our scribe does make one other significant addition to the text. Under Sonetti’s poem for Stampalia, he adds an entirely new poem Fig. 23).

ScLasi stampali da tramontana
Drizando ivez meridicc il tuo camino
Trovi conupi ale seche uccino
Placida di tablica e safazana
Con cinque scogli et poco piu lontana
Ucdl d conia aprovo un scoiolino E
poi muando fea oftro e gazbuno Piu
Longi ucdi Lixoleta plana Ginuczso
de Siroco sta la secovia Con iporceli
e bixogna aprir glioche Chiasto
camino de note se atrova
E non se fidi di pedoti siochi
Che chi sta in porta e bene no si mova
Per fin che de oriente phebo schochi

This poem does not correspond to any precedent that I have encountered, so I do not know if this was of his own invention, or if he is transcribing the work of another poetic geographer onto the pages of Sonetti. It would be very productive to know this though, especially if it is from a historical precedent, as it would help to identify the intellectual background of the owner of this volume and possibly even a general dating of this addition.

On the charts, much as in the BPL copy, the owner has added in names of cities, castles, churches, and of the islands that surround the main one being discussed. The names on these charts are more numerous than those on the BPL copy, but where they do intersect, they are transcribed in the same location and in the same direction. Some of the
names though, are written in a different, possibly Venetian dialect. On Scarpanto, he writes “el chaxo” and maps that include the direction of Asia Minore have it written as “Axia Minore.” On the map for “Damala e pochi altri isule”, the owner of this copy repeats the nearly same epigram in the exact same place, but with a few differences Figs. 24, 25).

(BPL)
Eximile olim istmos cesare dictator demetrius
Domitio c calugula imp volseno ralgiar
Chl mar passase et rimastro
augurio

(Morgan)
Exsimilia olim istimos cexare dictore dometzio
Domicio nerone et claugaio Caligula
Tentorono de taiaz chel maz pasasa e
Augurio

This repetition and the parallels between the additions on these two copies are particularly curious because they are just different enough that it is not possible to say that they were aware of each other or made by the same individual, but it is obvious that the individuals adding these notes were both aware of the same inspirational source, and are responding to the same tradition. The inscription here mentioned is not included in either the Buondelmonti or the Bordone and searches for another source of it have returned no results. The apparent listing of classic Roman Emperors make me wonder if it could be and excerpt from Ptolemy’s Geographia. The labels too, clearly share a common source, but not one that I have yet encountered. Again, another avenue for future research on this work presents itself in identifying the sources for these text additions, as this information would vastly help improve our understanding of how this book was received, what it brought to mind for its owners, and how it was put to use by those who possessed it.
Continuing on this discussion of the parallels between the BPL copy and this one, the scribe of this book also drew in his own cityscape of Athens (Fig. 26), a few small islands and a castle on the island of Sancta Erini.

Conclusions:

Of the five copies here described, representative of the first print edition of the *Isolario*, three are materially similar but the other two differ significantly. The BPL copy is shallowly printed, with the paper showing no embossing or plate marks from its printing, and has no watermark in the paper. The Rosenwald collection copies at the LOC and the Bennett collection from the Morgan similarly have no watermark and are lightly printed. The second copy at the LOC though, has a distinctive watermark in the shape of a square topped by a circle with a tower like projection with two triangles projecting out of it. It is very heavily printed as well, with the paper showing deep dimples on the reverse of the printed lines. Plate marks are also present. The 1954 acquisition from the Morgan was also printed on very lightweight paper that shows heavy embossing and plate marks.

Though it may seem curious that variances in material qualities exist within a single run off of a book, it was not at all an uncommon occurrence. Sean Roberts, in *Printing a Mediterranea*, discusses this phenomenon in the context of Florentine Renaissance book production. Books were made for a wide array of audiences, from the elite collector to the lower to middle class consumer. As a result, the material quality of the books was tailored to their audience, often resulting in tiered production quality that matched the tiered budgets of their consumers. Copies intended for the most discerning of patrons, often set aside to be hand illuminated after their printing, would be printed on high quality paper with inks least likely to smear. Lower priced copies may have been
printed on any variety of cheaper, most likely leftover sheets of paper. Within a single issue then, a book can be found in any number of differing material presentations.

The same occurs with the hand coloration of these volumes. Roberts suggests that printed books were primarily hand painted in order to increase their material value, a practice that responded to the still-lingering esteem for the manuscript tradition. In an equally important way though, the coloration of these printed geographies helped to make them more legible. With water colored blue and land colored in earth tones, there would be no mistaking what the viewer was looking at. The kind of coloration demonstrated by the two copies at the Morgan Library demonstrate a powerful visual message, not just of aesthetic value, but of a didactic nature as well.

William Ivins’ book, *Prints and Visual Communication* is famous for its study of the print as the “exactly repeatable image,” claiming that this special quality of reproducibility inherent to the medium of printing made possible the standardization of knowledge and its widespread dissemination. What we learn from works such as this *Isolario* though, is that there is no such thing as the exactly repeatable image. Images might come off the press looking similar, but as the cases of the Boston Public Library copy, both Library of Congress copies and both Morgan Library copies demonstrate, they do not stay that way for long. In these copies, paper quality varies, ink tones vary, and their possessors altered and personalized their property. All of these elements suggest differing uses, audiences and interpretations of the book, a far cry from the standardization of message advocated by Ivins’ theories.
Chapter 3: An Island of Words, an Analysis of da li Sonetti’s Poetry

In order to best understand Sonetti’s work, I will now engage in an analysis of the text itself. I will begin by analyzing the introductory passage, which provides insight into how Sonetti envisioned his own work being received, then move on to examining three of the island episodes, those of Cerigo, El Caloiero, and Negroponte. I will examine the visual and verbal descriptions of these places in the context of Sonetti’s *Isolario*, his predecessor Buondelmonti’s *Liber* and his follower Bordone’s *Isolario de tutte le isole nol mondo*.

Introductory Poem

As previously mentioned, Sonetti’s book begins with a 5 page introductory passage. After the tercet anagram dedication to Doge Mocenigo, the body of the introduction begins. Sonetti starts his poem by stating that through his “humble and lowly rhymes” he hopes that his “style will bring to light… that which is much admirable”, which he names to be the archipelago of the Aegean. Interestingly, in lines 5-6 and he makes reference to the fact that his work is produced through the “modern machine” of the printing press, leaving no doubt that he did not intend his work to be nostalgic for the age of the illuminated manuscript. He goes on to describe here very generally the landscape of the Aegean, with its “many islands big and small / and rocks and cities and castles.” This description from lines 16-18 echoes the information that he chooses to include on his maps, preparing the reader for the types of information that they can expect to receive through reading this book. Throughout this passage, he repeatedly claims the beauty and

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46 All poems referenced in this section can be found in their original Italian form in Appendix A
wonder of the Aegean, exalting the region’s beauty and abundance, finally in line 43
telling us that this is why he began to write, because of “the power of the sea of sirens’
calls.”

Sonetti does not hesitate to stake his personal claim of agency and responsibility
for the work throughout this passage. From the first page of the introduction, the reader is
aware that the author of this text is basing it off of first hand experience. He frequently
uses the first person pronoun io in conjunction with his descriptions of the marvels of the
Aegean. “I yearn for this rambling/ Sometimes it made me so happy that I could not be
sad/ And I saw everything that remained.” He has embarked on a journey (or several as he
later reveals) to this place, saw everything there is to see, and has returned, left with a
yearning to do it all again. We may presume that he is writing this text so that his audience
may relive his journey and his joy. Sonetti even tells us his target audience, his work is
“for the contemplation of the mariners / and for the pleasure of everyone / that can read
my base language.” In this statement, he is making clear that this product of his is both
reliable enough to be of use to a mariner, and enjoyable enough to bring pleasure to the
recreational reader. This is an important statement when considering how the book was
consumed around the time of it publication.

Sonetti refers to himself by his pseudonym in two separate instances. He first
names himself on line 80.

“For me the good Venetian Bartholomio
Of the Sonnets composed this.
And having a spirit prompted with desire
and with seeing eyes and (una aduna) …
With my own hands drew each of these
In this little volume of the Aegean Places”

In this passage, Sonetti names himself, staked a claim for writing the book, and told us
that he drew each chart himself, referencing his “seeing eyes” to drive home the point that
the drawings were based on experiential knowledge. Curiously, this reference to drawing each place is the only indication made in the introduction that images would be accompanying the verse that would follow. From the lack of gloating about the charts that Sonetti does about his poetry, he does not seem to value the visual component of his book as much as the verbal one.

He again names himself in the final sonnet of the introduction, the segment of this passage where Sonetti gives his reader almost all of the biographical information known about him.

To prove this feat achieved  
By me Bartolommeo da li Sonetti  
I intend to demonstrate with true effect  
That I have searched the Aegean  
And how, with my compass to the wind  
I have stepped repeatedly on each isle  
And ports and bays and rocks dirty and clean  
With the stylus on the chart I have marked  
15 times in the trireme I have gone  
oficially and then patrone in nave  
at the mercy of my master who honored me  
twice with Bembo and three perari I sailed  
On long journeys and with the good Donato  
Three voyages with Lordani 2 were rough the other more calm  
Querini baradona and barbarigo  
Comes rimondo zorzi nocenigo

The trireme that he refers to in the second half of the sonnet is a type of large Venetian merchant vessel. Sonetti claims to have travelled through this region on this ship type 15 times, then several more times as a passenger of honor on the smaller boats of Bembo, the Loredani, Pexari, and Donato families, among others. To have been aboard to many voyages must mean that Sonetti’s reputation as a seafarer was widely known.
In conclusion, from this introductory passage, the reader is without a doubt made to know that what they are about to read is based on the personal experiences of one man, Bartolommeo da li Sonetti. Through a lengthy and comprehensive list off all the islands included in the work, and a brief summation of their reports that Sonetti undertakes in the middle of his introduction, and the mention of cities and castles, rocks and shoals, the reader knows exactly what they will be seeing and reading as well, and is provided with a functioning table of contents apparatus to help guide them.

Per Cerigo

The first sonnet, map and location that I will discuss are those for Cerigo, which represents the island today known as Cythera (Fig. 27). I chose to start with this sonnet because, as the first sonnet of the book, it sets a precedent of expectation for what follows. As the first poem, it is highly representative of the majority of the charts and descriptions in the Isolario. It takes one of the two standard forms that the poems take throughout the book, being 19 lines long with two quatrains, two tercets and two couplets. Aside from its form, the content of this poem, as a blend of navigational hints and historical curiosities, is also fairly standard for the descriptions in the book.

As previously mentioned, Sonetti starts his literary journey on the western edge of the Aegean, then moves the text through a rigorously organized tour of the region. In the last two lines of this poem, he himself states why he begins with Cerigo: because it “is the first true island/ of the archipelago of the Aegean towards the west.” This provides context for the island in geography and the scheme of the book. The text for Cerigo provides the reader with even more geographical information in the first two lines, and in its final tercet, telling that “the island is 15 miles distant/ towards the southwest from Cape Malea”
and that Dragonera can be found to the east. Sonetti also tells us that the island is approximately 60 miles around. He tells of the mountainous topography of the island and mentions four castles built there.

In addition to providing geographic context for the island, Sonetti also includes an historic one. The descriptions in the Isolario almost always include a statement on the nomenclature of the island and give its name in antiquity. In this case, we know that it was called Citharea, the name given to the island because of the birth of Venus, who also goes by this name that occurred near the island. Sonetti clearly tells us that this was the place where “Paris, son of the King Priam/ kidnapped Helen and took her to Troy.” Today, it is very difficult to find a source outside of the Isolario tradition for this claim, as most accounts have Paris abducting the beauty in Sparta.

In this poem, Sonetti makes no reference to Venetian involvement here. In reality though, Cerigo was vitally important to Venetian trade and transport with the East as it allowed the Republic to control the passage of ships from the Ionian Sea into the Aegean. It came under Venetian rule as part of the spoils of the Fourth Crusade, and remained their territory until their collapse in 1797. Despite having been a Venetian territory for nearly 300 years, Sonetti makes no connection between the island and his patria.

Through his rhetorical devices in Per Cerigo, Sonetti adheres to his stated aim of producing a work “for the contemplation of the mariners / and for the pleasure of everyone / that can read my base language.” The poem is written in the first person, allowing Sonetti to claim that he himself, along with his crew, found three uninhabited castles he mentions in line 13, giving his account the appearance of validity and appeal to the navigationally inclined audience. First person narrative is also employed in line 11, when
Sonetti links the historical anecdote about the ignition of the Trojan War from the lines above to “the histories that we read.” This time though, the affect is to draw the reader into personal involvement with this narrative.

To root the Isolario’s description of Cerigo, I will also look at how Buondelmonti and Benedetto Bordone treat it in their respective works. Buondelmonti calls the island Kituria and depicts two sites of ruins (Fig. 28), one of which he identifies as the site where Helen was abducted by Paris. The description of Cerigo in the Bordone Isolario (Fig. 29) is a more fully fleshed-out version of Sonetti’s, detailing the history of the island’s nomenclature by explicitly stating that it was the birthplace of Venus. He adds to the list of names Porphiris, the name Aristotle gave to the island due to its abundance of the beautiful marble. This text also mentions the episode between Helen and Paris, and on his map, draws and labels the castle where it took place, Citheron. This castle, he claims was the temple of Venus where the goddess, in return for Paris deeming her the most beautiful, offered him Helen. Finally, he concludes by giving the same measurements for the island that Sonetti provides.49

Per Caloiiero

When looking through the Isolario, one of the most attention grabbing images is the one that represents Caloiiero (Fig. 30). This island’s literary representation becomes even more intriguing when compared to its other occurrences in the Isolario tradition.

The island of Caloiiero, Kaloyeros or Kalogeroi today, is little more than a high cluster of rocks in the middle of the Aegean (Fig. 31). The poem for this location begins

49 “Porphiris this place was called in antiquity, for the beauty of the marble that was here (according to Aristotle) and the first place where Venus was born ... There is a castle that at the present is called Cythara, in which was the Temple of Venus where she made the sacrifice in which she gave Paris and Helen their love... The circumference of the island is 60 miles.”
by describing it in just this way. “Here too I must treat/ a very high rock in the middle of
the sea.” It goes on to tell us that this rock is called Panaiea or Caloiero, which mean “The
Virgin” and “monk” respectively. The poem tells us that naming this rock Caloiero, monk,
is appropriate because the sole inhabitants of it were “certain monks in the church which is
on the little plateau.” These monks had a hidden secret that made living on this
inhospitable landmass a little easier. As the map depicts as the singular overwhelming
feature of the island, the monks “had a little boat which they drew up and down with a
device/ so had it ready for their needs.” Besides the account of the monks, the poem places
emphasis on the topography of the island that lends an excellent view of the surrounding
area. Sonetti first describes this phenomenon in lines 4-5 when he says “Here, if one is
willing to endure the fatigue and pain of climbing to the summit/ it is so high that one can
see almost all the islands.” The last line of the poem states “From this island you can see
Lango (Kos) in the southern direction.” Unlike the other poems of the book, these
statements are the only information Sonetti provides to give geographic context for this
location. All we know is that it lies somewhere to the north of the island of Kos, but
beyond this, it is difficult to ascertain what place he is actually referencing.47

Both the Buondelmonti Liber (Fig. 32) and Bordone’s Isolario (Fig. 33) include
the same anecdote about Caloiero that Sonetti excludes. Their texts also provide slightly
more locational information to help a navigator. In the Liber, Buondelmonti writes:

Between Chios and Andros is an exceedingly high rock called Caloerus, which
most rapacious crags all around it, so that no way is found to the top. It is called
Caloerus from the Greek calos, which means bonus... bonus senex by antiphrasis,
since it is found very evil and most menacing by voyagers at all seasons. Very

47 W. Sidney Allen takes up the charge of identifying the place meant by references to
Caloiero in the isolarii of Buondelmonti, Sonetti and Bordone in his article “Kaloyer: An
Atlantis in Microcosm” from Imago Mundi, vol 29 (1977) pp. 54-77. He concludes
that it refers to a small landmass located at latitude 38°10’04” N and longitude
25°17’17” E.
often, ships coming and going … are wrecked. Sailors passing through this sea are wont to curse this rock, and pointing the place out from afar, they swiftly turn their sails towards the open sea. When once a Turkish craft was sunk here, the men escaped for two days on the rapacious rocks; on the third day a Christian ship appeared and moved by pity, its crew rescued them all half alive in their vessel. But near the island of Psara, when the Turks, who were walking about unguarded in the ship had regained their strength, they fell upon the Christians.\footnote{Translation copied from Allen, pp 54-77.}

Buondelmonti situates this dangerous rock between Chios and Andros. The text of Bordone’s work combines Sonetti and Buondelmonti’s anecdotes and adds that this place may be found 20 miles west from Nifaro. This is the most precise directional information given among these three works.

The chart depicts a small rocky island that is apparently so tall that it projects above the compass rose with the device to raise and lower the little boat dominating the scene. This is the only chart in Sonetti’s work where a real sense of three-dimensionality is perceptible. The pole used as leverage in the map is the same length as the island is tall. The poem says of it, “for a long time they kept it a secret/ but then it was lost to them and their successors.” The unrealistic scale of the device in the map then can be explained by this anecdote. Since it was lost, Sonetti could only have heard rumor of it, and therefore his drawing was excused from the burden of depicting something empirically observed.

When looking at Buondelmonti’s Liber Insularum Archipelagi, we see that this work provides a very close antecedent for Sonetti’s image. The monastery and boat are more detailed and the rock less craggy, but they are clearly related images. The Bordone image of Caloiero is even closer to the Sonetti than the Sonetti is to the Buondelmonti. The scale of the leverage contraption to the island is the same; the major difference being only that Bordone’s image is shaded to give dimensionality to the rock.
A map that I have not yet mentioned in this paper, but one that is integral to the history of cartography is a portolan of the Mediterranean and Aegean, called the Kitab-I Bahriye, compiled by Ottoman admiral and cartographer, Piri Reis in 1513. I bring this map into my discussion now because so far, I have been examining the Isolario tradition in a scope limited to the Italian peninsula. There are many parallels between Sonetti’s Isolario and Piri Reis’ portolan, but as Thomas Goodrich points out in his article Better Directions as Sea: The Piri Reis Innovation, the Kitab-I Bahriye directly copies Sonetti’s chart for Caloiero. This demonstrates that the fame and influence of this Isolario exceeded that of a regional curiosity and had an impact on mariners and cartographers in both the East and West.

Per Negroponte

The final sonnets that I am going to discuss here are for Negroponte, now called Euboea (Fig. 34). This is the third to last place discussed, followed only by Damala Sete and Cypress. Stalimene and Tenedo precede it. I chose to conclude with this location because Sonetti devotes three sonnets to it and a double page map, an extensive treatment the likes of which is only given elsewhere to Candia (Crete).

The island is the second largest of the Greek Isles, and is 93 modern miles long, running from northwest to southeast. It varies in width from six to thirty one miles. Negroponte is the Venetian name given to the island of Euboea during the Venetian rule there, which lasted from 1390 to 1470 until it was wrested from their control by the Ottoman Turks. It was called Negroponte, which translates to “black bridge” because of

the bridge that connected the island to the Peloponnesian mainland, an area called Boeotia, which lies just to the east.

Euboea is a place that has an extensive history, both in classical antiquity and in the medieval and early modern eras. It was especially important to the Venetians, as it was a hotly contested territory in their struggle for dominance in the Aegean. For this reason, it makes sense that Sonetti would devote so much space to it, but as we will see, the areas on which he focuses his attention in these sonnets are not as nationalistic as one might expect.

The first sonnet is twenty lines long, differing from the standard format of sixteen line poems that he employs throughout the work. This poem adheres in content though, with the rest of the subject matter of the other descriptions. He begins by naming the location, by both its Greek and Venetian name. (“Euboea Negroponte is now called”) and provides the most commonly repeated mythological and chorographic details about the island. The second line the poem describes how the island was formed, claiming that it separated from the mainland Boeotia in antiquity. The Straight of Euripus is mentioned next and Sonetti repeats the trope that the current through this narrow pass that separates the island from the peninsula was very dangerous and could change at any moment. Strabo and many other geographers mention that the current through Euripus was as strong as a river and could easily trap an entire fleet, as it did to the navy of Agamemnon during the Trojan War. Sonetti goes on to exalt the Venetian-built bridge that connects the island to Boeotia and the reputation that the native inhabitants of the island were unintelligent, a rumor initiated by the archrivals of the Euboeans, the Athenians. Sonetti concludes the poem with two couplets, the first of which gives the circumference of the island, 365

50 The region is prone to earthquakes, which Greek mythology claims is due to the wrath of Poseidon, and it is likely that the island did separate from the peninsula due to tectonic activity.
miles, and the second a glimpse of the mythological references to the island as discussed by Strabo.

The only connection to Venetian affairs that can be found in this description of Negroponte is not a direct one at all. It must be inferred from the possessive pronouns that Sonetti uses in lines 10 and 11, “il tuo forteza” and “il tuo ponte”, the “tuo” referring to the fact that these items were built by Venetians, during Venetian rule and the work was dedicated to the Doge of Venice, therefore making these structures his possessions.

The next sonnet begins with a geographic orientation of the island, telling us that it lies adjacent to the peninsula. After that, Sonetti ventures into what is little more than a listing of major landmarks of the region of Attica. This poem lists seven locations in nine lines, with no other information given about these places other than the superlatives of “most worthy” and “noble.” No cartographic information or historical anecdotes are given to help provide context for these places for the reader except for in the last three lines when Sonetti references Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who was a Roman general and statesman who staged several campaigns throughout Attica and baths that were much renowned and copied by Romans.

The final sonnet for Negroponte continues this listing of place names, but also includes scant details about the ancient origins of the island and areas in Attica. Sonetti lists several of the ancient names for Euboea, including Macris, Abantis and Chalcides. He mentions that the ruins of many ancient fortresses could be seen, included the columns from the Academy of Athens. The poem also mentions Piraeus, which was a vitally important port near Athens, telling that that was the point of entry to see the sights

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mentioned in the poem as well as the site where the Athenian turned Trojan statesman Alcibiades contemplated staging a naval battle against the Athenians.\textsuperscript{52}

Trying to validate and compare the information contained in these three sonnets with historical sources proved to be quite difficult. In some cases, I was only able to identify the place names Sonetti provides as such because they appear in the hand written additions to the accompanying chart and in the Bordone map of the island. The source material that Sonetti must have relied on was very academic in nature. The references that I have uncovered have been from ancient Greek writers, such as Strabo, Thucydides, and Aeschylus that are rather obscure today.

Nearly absent from this poetic description is any contemporary account of the region and there is no mention of the struggle between the Venetians and the Ottomans over the island.

I have not been able to obtain a translation of the account of Negroponte from the \textit{Liber Insularum}, but the non-Venetian specific, erudite nature of the description make it a likely candidate as the prototype for Sonetti’s description. Bordone’s account is similarly detached from any connection to Venetian history, instead providing a comprehensive retelling of the Greek myth of the naming of the island and the same geographic information that Sonetti provided, that the island was 365 miles around.

The map that accompanies the Negroponte poems in the \textit{Isolario} very closely parallels the actual shape and orientation of the island. On the chart, the land forms are rotated about 45 degrees west, so that the island is horizontal across the page, presumably a tactic to maximize the use of space on the page, allowing for the most land to be

\textsuperscript{52} Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Chapter XXXVI
depicted as possible. On the island of Euboea, the map shows 23 symbols that represent structures, the largest and grandest of which is the fortress mentioned in the first sonnet from whence the bridge to the mainland originates. On the mainland, there is another fortress where the bridge connects and three other buildings. On all three of the copies I have seen that contain alterations, the person committing the alterations has drawn in a cityscape of Athens and an image of Mount Parnassus, in addition to many place names, including all of those mentioned in the poems as well as many others. This map is a perfect example of why hand coloring these pages was employed as a tool to make them more legible on top of making them decorative. By just looking at the engraved lines on the page, this map makes it exceedingly difficult to distinguish between land and water, especially on the left portion of it. Color would make it much easier to make this distinction.
Chapter 4: The *Isolario* in Context

Sonetti’s intentions for producing his *Isolario* in the manner that he did has sparked much debate about how the book was used and received by its contemporary audience. In this chapter, I will explore this debate using the sonnets that I have already outlined in the previous chapter, and by looking at Renaissance theories on the relationship between text and image in cartographic work. From these, a more conclusive understanding of how this book was read may be reached.

In order to come to a better understanding of how this book might have operated in 15th and 16th century Venice, it would be helpful begin with an understanding of the early modern nature of Geography as an academic discipline in addition to a practical one. Geographic culture of the early modern period “insisted on the integration of word and image in accurately and adequately describing the world. Geographers were understood to be broadly proficient in both verbal and graphic skills.”

Roberts claims that in the 15th century geography was universally recognized as being of a synthetic nature. There did not exist the concept of a cartographer in the 15th century, only the geographer, a man who took up Ptolemy’s charge to be a describer of the world in words and pictures, to be a geographer, poet and mapmaker.

This stemmed from Ptolemy and Fra Paolino’s avocation that geography was a unification of theory and practice, which, in the practice of Renaissance geographers, evolved into description and drawing. The introductory poem of the *Isolario* supports this claim in the way that Sonetti so proudly boasts that he both wrote the sonnets and drew the maps with his own hands and by the prowess of his own mind.

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53 Roberts, 87,88.

54 Roberts, 88. He doesn’t provide any reference for this conclusion though
That this unification of theory and practice, of description and drawing was required of the Renaissance geographer indicates that maps, rather than being an end point of the mimetic processes of geographic representation, are also “performative tools” to aide in a broader geographical understanding of the world. This is the category that Sonetti’s charts belong to. His maps are able to communicate little on their own and serve to ground the textual description provided in a form of visual authority. In their simplicity, they help the reader, especially one who is a stranger to navigational practice, to visualize the cartographic concepts being described, without overwhelming them with an incomprehensible amount of minute details.55

“Material properties of books helped to structure reading as a kind of surrogate experience for the travel described in the poem.”56 In many works of the narrative geographic genre, authors would imbed narrative devices instructing their reader to ‘look to the left’ where they would be greeted by a chart visually depicting what they were reading. Books like Berlingheri’s Geographia and the Isolario made reading an interactive process, one in which text and image worked together to help the reader imagine them self in the described space. As far as I have uncovered, Sonetti’s sonnets do not include commands to the reader to regard his charts, but they do frequently involve vivid imagery that describes what can be seen by looking in a specific direction, the state of disrepair of castles that were encountered, and the delicious taste of wine and fruit that can be consumed on some of these islands for the readers’ imagination. The maps that accompany poems where he describes distance relationships between places are supplemented with a scale bar. The compass rose that each island is superimposed on contextualizes the directional descriptions in the sonnets. In the rigorous structured pages of a work such as this one, the reader’s eyes can easily shift from the verse to a schematic

55 Roberts, 84.
56 Roberts, 84.
representation of what they were reading. Text and image then are inseparable because the maps, though they may be generic, take the reader on Sonetti’s journey in their mind.

A component of the arguments put forth by scholars on this work is that it was produced for practical use. Scholars such as Frederick Goff believe that, like the portolan charts, navigators used this volume on their voyages. George Tolias perpetuates the notion of the navigational purpose of the Isolario and its maps by distinguishing it as a “nautical Isolario”. This distinction stems from the attention given on the maps to nautical hazards such as reefs and the practical inclusion of scale bars measured in nautical miles. Tolias also claims that the island outlines provided by Sonetti are more accurate than those of his predecessors, such as Buondelmonti. Scholars argue that the added information about specific landmark locations is of the type that would be useful to someone trying to navigate by them and of the type that a navigator would gain through its use, that these alterations also simulated manuscript portolans used for several centuries prior to the publication of the Isolario. The research here compiled though, points to just the opposite interpretation. I believe that it is apparent that while it is plausible that a navigator could and would have contemplated the Isolario to inform their voyages, this was not Sonetti’s primary target audience.

The Isolario of Sonetti was published in two editions. The second edition came out 47 years after the first edition, in 1532. Despite almost 50 years of political changes to the Republic’s land holdings in the Aegean and improvements to charting and navigational methods, there appears to be no changes in content in the two editions. The dedication to Doge Mocenigo remains the same. The errors that Donattini accuses Sonetti of making,


58 Tolias, 264

59 Tolias, 269

60 Goff, vii.
such as a misattribution of an anecdote to Ovid and the incorrect naming of the island of Dipso are not corrected in this second printing. Since the identity of the author is unknown, we cannot know whether or not he was alive at the time of the second edition to advocate its re-emission. What then, was the motivation for taking this book back to the presses? The answer to this question may well be another way to help us understand the reception of this work.

It is difficult to quantify the popularity of the Isolario through the number of copies printed and sales statistics since they have yet to be uncovered, but based on the considerably large number of editions that remain today, and the recycling of its images in the non-European maps of Piri Reis for example, it is safe to say that this work was well known and well regarded in its time. The work was consumed by a non-specialized, most likely elite, audience. By the first decades of the 16th century, the Isolario may well have obtained the status of a luxury object of cultural curiosity. I here argue then that the second edition of 1532 was produced to indulge a sort of nostalgia. As the first editions, which were printed on lesser quality materials that reflected the uncertainty of commercial success, were consumed and discarded, fewer copies were available. Collectors that did missed the opportunity to possess the 1485 copy wanted their chance to own one for them self. These collectors may have been trying to recover a certain sense of the ‘good ol
days’ of the Republic and of book printings. If it were to have been used by navigators, the maps would have been updated, and the verse as well would have been altered to remedy the errors it contained. Lacking these, the attribution of the cause of this second edition’s publication to nostalgia then, makes clear that it was a luxury item prized by collectors.

The question of how this book was consumed by 15th and 16th century readers can also be approached by examining the format of the work itself, how the two elements that Sonetti uses to tell us about a place interact. When I began to think about the relationship between text and image in Sonetti’s Isolario, I was thinking about the relationship in terms of primacy. Which element was able to tell the reader more about the place being depicted? How did they interact and did this interaction improve the reader’s knowledge about the location? To answer these questions, I will take as evidence the three poems and their charts described in Chapter Two and look at the correlation between the information contained in the poems and the symbols on the maps.

When I began this project, I expected the correlation between text and image to be strong. After all, this supposedly is a book for the contemplation of mariners and the enjoyment of casual readers. As a closer examination of the book made apparent though, these elements bear almost no relation to one another. It is as if the left hand pages of the book are intended for the armchair traveller and the right pages were those meant for the seamen. There is a significant disconnect between the two rhetorical features Sonetti employs, but, at the same time, they cannot be entirely separated.

George Tolias in his article on isolarii in The History of Cartography states that Sonetti’s sonnets are a very fragmentary form, that they constitute an autonomous island
of words adjacent to an autonomous island mapped. While it is clear that there is a strong disconnect between the information contained in the poems compared to the charts, I do not think that both elements can be said to be autonomous. The point that the maps are removed from any kind of geographic framework has repeatedly arisen throughout this paper. They are isolated within their compass roses with nothing to give them context. If the maps from the original printed edition were to be separated from their poems, the reader would have no way of knowing at what they were looking. For this reason, they depend heavily on the poems opposite them to give them meaning. Because they vary in scale from one page to another, and the directional orientation also shifts, I highly doubt even the most experienced navigator could look at one of these charts by itself and identify the place depicted. For this reason, I argue that the poems could exist without the maps, but these maps could not be meaningful without the poems.

Historical anecdotes cannot be portrayed on the face of a map, and every detail of the geography and topography of a place cannot be included in a short sonnet. Though the maps do contain a plethora of information not included in the sonnets, I maintain that they would not be comprehensible without leaning heavily on the poems for support. There is no information that is crucial to understanding the geography of a place that is not included in the sonnets. The extra information that is shown through the map, such as forests and castles not mentioned in the text, I believe is of a sort that would make sense and be familiar to a navigator well acquainted with the region, but innocuous enough to not be distracting to a less informed audience.

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The first location described is the island of Cerigo. The poem shares the page with the sonnet for Cecerigo and its map shares space with many other landforms. By solely looking at this map, without labels or identification, how is the reader to know which island is Cerigo (Fig. 27), which is Cecerigo and what the other places included in the frame are? The reader would have to turn to the text to make this determination. The poem tells that the island is very mountainous and rarely flat and the physical landmarks on the island that it mentions are Castle Cithaeron and three other inhabited fortresses. Looking over at the map, on the island furthest to the right, there are indeed four structures on the island, each of which sits atop a hill. These pedestal-like hills are the only indication of the mountainous terrain. Based on its scale, we may presume that the Castle Cithaeron is the structure furthest to the right on the island. This island map then, does demonstrate a correlation between it and the text, but its generic nature makes it little more than an illustration.

The illustrative nature of these maps is nowhere better exemplified than in the map for Caloiero (Fig. 30). There is nothing in the map that is not discussed in the sonnet. Based on the map alone though, there is no context for the location of this rocky island, making it impossible to situate geographically. Instead, the image shows a disproportionate representation of the most culturally interesting element of the place, the mechanism to raise and lower the little boat.

The sonnets for Negroponte (Fig. 34) present the strongest case of the image relying on the text. The sonnets for this major island include little more than a laundry list of names of fortresses and sites of historical importance. They do not provide their location or even their spatial relationship to one another, but in their case, that is
unimportant. The map, on the other hand, shows many generic buildings on the island and on the mainland (which are nearly impossible to tell apart) without any indication of their significance. The text gives the symbols meaning and the image helps the reader concretize what they are reading, though they probably cannot discern which structure corresponds to which ancient site. The island is named for the bridge that connects it with the Greek peninsula, and correspondingly, the most detailed element of the map are the two castles that are on either side of the Straight of Euripus. This narrow waterway was rumored to be exceptionally dangerous to ships passing through it, but oddly, there is no indication of this hazard on the map. For the map to have legitimacy as a navigational tool, it would be logical for this important detail to be included, but it is not, with the focus instead on the cultural landmarks of the area.

As I have already exhaustively detailed, I came across many post-production alterations and they were very telling about how the book was received. One could argue that the addition of place names and the coloring of the maps served a practical purpose, to help a navigator make sense of the images, but they just as equally could seen as evidence of aesthetic beautification and as the owner showing off their classical knowledge or responding to later Isolario conventions. Alterations made to the text part of these books show no relevance to navigational strategies. The entire poem added to a Morgan copy, the system of symbols on the LOC copy and the repeated epigram found on the BPL copy and both Morgan copies all point to the book’s literary reception above a practical one.

I began this investigation of Sonetti’s Isolario with the goal of determining if there was communicative primacy given to the poetry or the maps. From this research, I conclude that, while in Renaissance cartographic culture, the two elements should
distribute the responsibility of communication equally between them, the Isolario tells its story through the text, using the maps as a secondary element, more decorative than informative. Based on this deduction, I am concluding that the Isolario was most commonly consumed by a sector of the population who were not directly involved with navigating a ship through the Aegean Sea, but were instead more comfortable reading the book from the comforts of their own libraries.
Conclusion

Capitalizing on the increasingly profitable printing industry of Venice, and the growing legitimacy and commercial success of cartography, I believe that the Isolario by Bartolommeo da li Sonetti represents the formulation of a “recipe for success” that would guarantee that his work would become a commercial sensation. Sonetti assembles all of these elements that were tropes of Renaissance cartography, in order to lend his work legitimacy, but employs them superficially in his book. He is educated and well versed in the cartographic tradition and the lineage of his genre. By combining Berlingheri’s lyrical precedent with Buondelmonti’s classicist content, Sonetti appropriated elements from the most successful works of his age and united them in a book, along with his own boasting of that had just enough of the appearance of usefulness in order to ensure its wide appeal and its commercial success.
Appendices

Appendix A: Italian Poems referenced in the text in order that they appear in the *Isolario*

Introductory Poem

Al Divo Cinquecento cinque e diece
Tre Cinque a do Ma nulla tre e do un ecto
Nulla questa opra dar piu cha altra lecce

Al suon de le mie rime e basse Venga
chiun per vertute si gubna E cui lo
suo defio volentier passe
Che lo debil stil mio sara lucerna
De quegli i qual sta Machina modana
Defian che el studio suo chiaro discerna
La qual molto e admiribile e soprana
E vien da graci Colmos appellata
Che vol dir Modo che ellatio el spiana
Bel chui con veritate que se trata Per sta
operata de una parte bella Che l
pelago de egeo vien nominata
Ne la qual se saprea per mia loquella
Quante insule vi son picole e grande
Et scogli et seche e citate e castella
Li luochi i quali le dolce aque spande
Chome gia furno e come hora si trova
E qual venti contrastan le lor bande
Qual mure sono in piede e qual giu cova
Tute precise a voi sia manifesto
Ne vo che altri cha effeto sia mia prova
Chel non ce loco che io non agia pesto
E varghegiato de quanto che gira
Talor me lieto che io non son sta mesto
E veduto o anche ognuno in cui remira
Tuti cholor che de queste Ciclade
E Sporade: saper tuto desira
Potrasti anchor veder come appellade
Sun da gliatiquire chomo hora se chiama
E da cui suno et e signorizade
Et qual di quelle son degne di fama
Et furon anchor e qual de beni abunda
Et qual anchor de esser secorse braina
Qual ador de gente e piu iocanda
Et qual de done e pur tanto copisoa
Che homini non a tanti che risponda
E pero dona ognuna e si gratiosa
De queste che ciascuno che ivi ariva
E de secho restar lalma defiora
Unde per questo mi conven che scriva
Che el mar dele syrene I potria girli
A quel gran fiume de eloquntia emena
Che fece tanto in questo stilo udirsi
Dicea cantando io sum dolce serena
Che marinari in questo mar dismago
Tanto son de dolcezza vagho
Mie rime e mira che vedra quanto ordo
An ste insulete in sto profundo lago
Et averci anchor qualche aricordo
De queli I quali son degni de fede
Che audir ciaschaun de lor no son sta sordo
Il primi e quel che ove il sol tace fede
Nel gran diserto: e aiuto cholui
Dai tre fieri animal che niente illede
Laltro fo quel che sas chea ogni altro e pivi
Veder gia volse: e il ciner vargezando
Vivo al caldo vuulcan trabuco givi
Poi quel dionisio che scripse cantando
De sito orbis cum tal melodia
Che al ciel va anchor sua fama arinsonando
E sequitato o ancho il trogio e la via
De quel Ponponio mella tranto degno
Che un orpheo ppro par cantando el sia
Elincrito strabon con questo al segno De
chui se vede tanta fama sparta Che
recitarla a voi non agio ingegnio
E di altri asao ce sula bianca carta
Descrito an de sto sito pondalmente
Agio inquiriti per via lata e arta
Or per la gratia de lo omnipotente
De tutu lo universo alto factor
Che a prestatio favore a la mia mente
Adoperato lo defior cose
Per me bon venitian bartholomio
Da li soneti ver compositore
E avendo el spirito prompto col desio
E chon lochio vedute ad una aduna
E calchate col piede al voler mio
Con le mie proprre man picta o ciascuna
E in sto picol volume le agio poste
Chome a piacuto a la bona fortuna
Con soi Sonetti in settantadoe poste
A honor de Christo e de quei soi scolari
Che pdico il suo nome in piani e in coste
Et a contemplation de marinara
Et a piacere de tuti coloro
Che legerano I mei bassi vulgari
Or incomenza il mio dolce lavoro
Trovar Cerigo dicta chitharea
Per lo principio de sto teritoro
La qual per mezzo sta a capo Malea
Sancto angelo e poi segue Cecerigo
Poi linsula de Candia alta e nomea
Scarpantho e poi che da questo me spico
Ver Rodi prendo mia piacevol via
Che e forte asa piu degno che io no dico
Poi trovo Charchi apresso a Limonia
La Piscopia con Nifari passando
Vado a drito camino a Stampalia
E poi me patro questa star lassando
A namphyo agiugio e sancta Erini po
Ver Sicandro pian pian vo navigando
Policandro e vicino e a lui mi vo
E Sicno trovo partition da lui
A Milo vado che qui piu non sto
Sifano trovo e Serfino ambi dui
A Ferminia mi vado discorendo
Nequi mi resto per verderne pivu
Cya vego e Andre e Tine vo giungendo
Michone trapasando e le famole
Sdiles de cui va tanto ogni un legend
De Levita e Cinara so copiose
Mie pronte vele a navigar in freta
Che de Lero veder sono desiole
Pactamos gionge mia leve barcheta
E Sio trapassa e a Metelin arvia
E a Negroponte sie gionta soleta
Legina varcha non de voglia provada
Scorendo per le Sidre e per mar dargo
Come colei che fatica non schiva
E navigando per quel ampio margo
Gionta e di novo per prospero vento
Al loco dove pria moseil suo cargo
Ma il gia stanch nochier no ancho coteto
Vol del profundo Egeo far sua partita
Come quell buon che da desio viespeto
E pel tranquillo mar le velle gita
Al levissimo vento navicando Con la
dolce barcheta sua polita
E va per le chiare onde cavalcando
Come fortuna prospera lo scorge
Fun che Cypro a veduto a suo commando
E qui per longo asano il fero scorge
Periplus nison nel qual se contiene
Sesantatete ogni insula magiore
Novantaoro e poi che son minore
Riposte in questo egio che le sostiene
Si come el ciel che le stele ritiene
Qual picole qual grande e qual migliore
Così son queste e qualunque le score
Con il mar tranquilo de belta ripiene
Le miran tute la da prima vera
Con i suo scogli che son quattrocento
E piu sesantaoto che el non si erra
Le seche onde bisogna eser atento
Coperte e discoperte in mar e a terra
E saperle schivar per ogni vento
Si sono cento con quarantasei
Che dir fa a marinar sovente o mei

Per aprobar questa operata fata Per me
Bartolomeo da li Sonetti Intend de
monstrar con very effete Quanto che
tonda egiea cherchatta
Et se ho piu volte ogninsula chalchatta
E porti e vale e scogli I sporchi e I netti
Col bosolo per venti ho I capi retti
Col stilo in charte ciascuna segnatta
Quindece volte intrireme son
Oificiale e poi patrone in nave
Merce di mei signor che onor ma fato
Bis con el Bembo e tre pexari me ave
Sopranzo longo e prima el bon donato
Tre loredami ado viage grave
Laltro fu piu svave
Querini baxadona e barbarigo
Venire rimondo corci e Mocenigo

Per Linsula de Cerigo

Questa insula mia quindece lontata
Verso il garbino da capo malea
Fu dita antiquamente citharea
Da venus che nel mar dita e Diana
E molto montuoca e poco piana Il
castel citheron se vede in ea
Dove fu celebrate questa dea
Sol per gli antiqui eror da giene vana
In questa paris fiole de re priamo
   Rapite ellena e in troya meno via
   Per cui in le storie tanto mal legiamo
E volta circha da sesanta mia
   Tre castelli abitati vi troviamo
   Le dragonere da levanter I stia
   E do e daso e sia
La vogo in ostro intende quel che dicho
Che al presente e chiamata cericho
E de linsula prima veramente
Bel pelage de egeo verso el ponente

Per Namphio

Echo linsula namphio qui presente
   Aphios veramente e piu coreto Che
e vocabulo Greco e con effeto In
   latino vol dir senza serpent
Per che el teren de quella non consente
   Che animal venenosso e maledeto
   In lei si viva e senza altro rispeto
   Che vel portasse el moreria repente
In capo questa da levanter istava
   Una ben habitat e gran forteza
   Dove I pirati spesso se anidava
Donde per quella gente mala ueza
   Li suoi habitanti si la ruiniava
   E fene un altra al mezzo piu in alteza
   Stan con piu segueza
Treanta mia volge e non luntan da terra
Se vede I scogli e linsuleta gierra

Per El Caloiero

Ancora qui tartar si mi conviene
Dun altissimo scoglio a mez il mare
Che panaiea si se fa nominare
Altri il suo nome el caloiero tiene
Quivi si se sostien fatica e pene
Volendosse ala cima rampegare
Che quasi tute linsule mirare
Si pol di sopra lui tanto in alto’ene
Ma pur certi caloieri gia istava
Dentro la chiesia che in la pianureta
E cussi in alto sempre idio pregava
E supra questo aveva un barcheta Che
cum ingegno suso e giu calava E
cussi a suo bisogni laveva retta
E gran tempo secreta
La tene e poi manco lor e li redi
Questa in ver lhostro da lango tu vedi

Per Nicaria

Se icharo casco gia supra de questa col
volo che di crete in fin qui fece
Perche phebo scaldo tropo la pece
Ben fu dal padre dedalo contesta
Ma qui Varrone altro intelletto defta
Che icaro ben passasse in quella vece
Senza quelle ale e che cuz piu de diece
Ebe in questa Icaria la sua poresta
Questa sia longa stretta e grebanosa E
senza porti e fa mal dismontare Che
quasi intorno le tutta sassosa
In cima ai monti duo castegli appare
De boni melli e vini copisoa
A levanter e una torre apresso il mare
Setanta mia a girare
Ese alocasso e al garbo lochio assai
Stapodia vedi prima e dragonisi

Sonetto primo per Negroponte

Euboea Negroponte ora se crida
Da la boetia fuelta antiquamente
Per lo Euripon il quale e si corente
Che a lua volta e lautra a grande infida
Et e questa aqua in tal modo fortida
Che mai alchuno non la intese niente
Che or fu or giu la cosre si reprente
Che la mente a mirarla sta stupida
A preso de la terra vedi stare
   La sua forteza larga con un ponte
   Tanto che una galea vi pol passare
La forteza e boezia e piu congiunte
   E dove il ponte suo piu se a largare
   Per che a piu torta e longa via si smonte
   E li da preso e un monte
Ma linsula de intorno par che sia
Trecento con sesantacinque mia
   Strabon dice che havia
E gie cita che Neptuno saliva
Larme e da chui legeo se anomalava

Sonetto Secundo per Negroponte

Dal sirocco al maestro e sua longeza
   Greco e lebichio il suo traverse cade E
debe in lei gia molte alter citade
   Nobile e degne con grande forteza
Ceninto neso oreo chera in alteza
   Achalia graspilea sono mancade
   Portamo edpso vieno per trovade
   Ma non intanta dignita e beleza
Lavathia protimo chupa el portiri
   Larmeno con la stura eloci asai E
caristo piu degno in alto miri
Be ver maestro molti ne lasai
   Per che lamano alilanto mi tiri
Che de Cornelio sila mi pensai
Che fu in sto loco aibagni diti elopia
Edebe de romani in molta copia

Sonetto Terzo per Negroponte

In questa insula adeso e nominada
   Chalcides che vien dita Negroponte
   Lipso lo reo che per Avanti e conte
   Mandugo colochita e lalitada
   Linsula tuta antiquis fu chiamada
   Machris abantis da piano e da monte
   Ma qui desist con turbata fronte
   Per cui pensando la fu abandonada
Vedese la chanaia chleneum dita
   E golfi e porti e scogli in questa zona
Ma pu da grieco ne si ben fornita
   Pectalie chavalini e maratona
El rasti macrinisi et le collone
   La dove fu la chademia de atene
Legnia e poi che li si dita henone Che
   da pireo per ostro alei se viene
   Dove la armata e alzibiade sone
Che de ala cedemonia male e bene
Albara e slevda si e desabitata
E gina non e Megara in colfata
Images

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Fig 14a. Detail of hand drawn additions to the upper left corner of the map. Boston Public Library

Fig 15. Bibliotheca Sobolewskiana insert. Library of Congress. Photo by author
Fig. 16 Hand written addition to LOC copy of the *Isolario*. Photo by author.
S. primo per l'isola de Candia

L'isola del gran ioue tanto degna
la qual li siede vasta innome il mare
con il monte ideo e cento cita apare
in lei gia grande et iberima regna

Da questa elico degno par che vegna
ma de suo antiqui nomi iuo tractare
dice che creta scebe anominare
dal fiol de nembrot tal nome tegna

Bosides scrive che inui dita creti
per una ninpha desperides sia
e anasimandro dal re di coreti

Et altri dal terren quel nome pia
ma chrate ephilistide par che meti
che prima aerca e poi crete si sia

E ala voglia mia

Chi macharia gli dize nona erato
Beata e adir per laria tenperato

S. secundo per l'isola de Candia

Quiui regno saturno sapientissimo
fiolo de vriano che vol dir cielo
chastampar li moneta su primo elo
e in coltivare e seminare doctissimo
Ebe fra i altrui un sigillo erudelissimo.
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Fig. 34 Map for Negroponte, *Isolario*, Bartolommeo da li Sonetti, 1485
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