

Philostratus and the Canaries

JOHN. F. MOFFITT
New Mexico University

SUMMARY.—Philostratus the Elder composed his book of the *Imagines/Eikones* around 250 AD. The format is a series of written descriptions (*ekphraseis*) of real wall painting displayed in a Neopolitan villa. One of the series —*NESOI* (the Islands)—pictures an archipelago in the (Atlantic) Ocean. Philostratus' island-group is now identified as representing the Canary Islands, then as now, standing for the *insulae Fortunatae*.

«And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.»
— Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, i, 14 ff.

«La descripción de ciertas islas paradisíacas
en el remoto y misterioso Occidente es un
curioso fenómeno de la Antigüedad.»
— Antonio García y Bellido ¹

The Elder Philostratus' *Imagines (Eikones)*, a book of descriptions (dating from the first half of the 3rd-century) of some sixty ancient paintings, is not only the most extensive literary source in existence for the critical appreciation of ancient painting but, as well, it is the principal representative of classical painting in the Occident. On the one hand, the author characterizes the ensemble described as being by the hands of many masters. On the other, as had been demonstrated in 1941 in a study by Karl Lehmann-Hartleben ², Philostratus actually *saw* the collection of paintings; these he viewed in a

¹ A. García y Bellido, «Las Islas de los Bienaventurados o Islas Afortunadas», in *Veinticinco Estampas de la España Antigua*, Madrid, 1967, pp. 47-57 (p. 47). García y Bellido is the foremost authority on ancient Spanish history. Also useful to this study was A. O. Lovejoy & G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, New York, 1973. Neither of these works, however, makes any mention of Philostratus' *Imagines*.

² K. Lehmann-Hartleben, «The *Imagines* of the Elder Philostratus», *Art Bulletin*, XXIII, 1941, pp. 16-44. I shall be quoting from the text as given in *Philostratus' Imagines, Callistratus'*

suburban, terraced villa outside Naples. As is now believed, besides not being in any way imaginary, the pictures do not represent a single gallery as such, nor even the collection of easel-paintings of a connoisseur; they are instead «*pinakes*»-independently painted pictures on walls, or fresco-decorations. Therefore, according to Lehmann-Hartleben, the sequence of the *Imagines* is one derived from the placement of real murals, seen room by room, and from bottom to top of each wall, and from one to the next wall. As Lehmann-Hartleben summed up his argument, the «failure to account for the general ideas and the cyclic sequences prove that (Philostratus) really saw these pictures... He paraphrased rather than described the paintings, and pointed out the emotional values and psychological associations of each picture (providing) a description which was aimed not to describe but to interpret what the audience saw»³.

The purpose of this investigation is to demonstrate that not only are Philostratus' paintings «real» (a point perhaps already proven) but additionally to show that, at least in one specific instance, a given painting—a marine landscape—actually recorded a «real place» with a surprising amount of topographical accuracy. Accordingly, the details of Philostratus' description may permit us today to situate this place with a reasonable amount of confidence upon a modern map. The mural depicting this insular landscape was situated in what Lehmann-Hartleben has called «The Room of the Primitive World» (*Imagines*, II, 13-19), a room containing six other paintings, and the second in a sequence of five other frescoed and inner-connected rooms (fig. 1). In general terms, this cycle (*pinakes* 13-19) deals with the theme of the sea, with the activities of Poseidon (Neptune), and with the primeval origin of topographic features of landscape, particularly of a kind due to volcanic activity. The painting which interests me within this seven-part cycle is no. 17: «Islands» (NHΣ OI). As Lehmann-Hartleben suggests, this «picture represents the seven "Fortunate Islands", and it was inspired by learned poetic or mythographical sources»⁴. As I shall show by reviewing the pertinent textual materials, rather than being «mythical», the so-called «Fortunate Islands», lying beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar) as depicted in Philostratus' account, can be none other than the Canary Islands off the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Therefore, Philostratus' *eikon* represents the first documented landscape painting of the two present-day Spanish provinces comprising *Las Islas Canarias*. Moreover, on the basis of a comparison between modern topographical descriptions of the major *Canarias* and Philostratus' descriptions of each of these, I am enabled to trace a hypothetical route of discovery from each island to the next on a map (fig. 2).

Descriptions, with an English Translation, Loeb Classical Library: London, 1931. All other classical texts quoted in this paper are taken from the Loeb Classics, unless otherwise indicated.

³ Lehmann-Hartleben, p. 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28. In regard to the details of the stylistic appearance of this fresco, I would imagine that it rather looked like the well-known «Odyssean Landscape» in the Vatican Museum. On the other hand, there are two schools of thought as to the subject matter, meaning and nature of the landscape in the painting described by Philostratus. Many, of course, including Lehmann-Hartleben, just assume it to be an imaginative invention. On the other hand, some believe that it may have represented a real place, for example, the Aeolian Islands near Sicily and southern Italy; see especially: Theodor Welcker (ed.), *Philostratorum Imagines et Callistrati Statuae*, Leipzig, 1825, p. 485 ff. In any event, according to Lehmann-Hartleben (p. 29), «the painting which Philostratus describes is indeed *the* most comprehensive source for ancient speculation about the Fortunate Isles».

In his introductory statement, Philostratus makes two points essential for any accurate understanding of «The Islands». First, that we are actually viewing these several islands, just as they had been seen from the deck of a real sailing ship of the period which was (or had been) passing through and by The Islands. Secondly, that these Islands are not like—and hence were certainly not among—the Aegean Islands:

Would you like, my boy, to have us discourse about those *islands, just as if seen from a ship*, as though we were sailing in and out among them in the spring time, when Zephyrus makes the sea glad by breathing his own breeze upon it? But you must be willing to forget the land, and to accept this as the sea, not roused and turbulent nor yet flat and calm, but a sea fit for sailing and as it were alive and breathing. Lo, we have embarked; for no doubt you agree? Answer for the boy: «I agree, *let us go sailing*». You perceive that the sea is large, and the islands in it are *not*, by Zeus, Lesbos, nor yet Imbros or Lemnos, but small islands, herding together like hamlets or cattle-folds, or, by Zeus, like farm-buildings on the sea-shore ⁵.

Immediately after come Philostratus' descriptions of the eight individual «Islands» in this richly textured marine landscape of such great variety, beginning with the first, which I take to represent LANZAROTE.

(I) The first of these (which is *Lanzarote*) is steep and sheer and fortified by a natural wall (*Riscos de Famara*; 609 meters at their highest). It lifts its peak aloft for all-seeing Poseidon; it is watered with running water and furnishes the bees with food of mountain flower, which the Nereids doubtless pluck when they sport along the seashore ⁶.

(II) The adjoining island (evidently, *Isla Graciosa* to the north: next to which is *Isla Aegranza*, having then [?], as today, a lighthouse), which is flat and covered

⁵ «The Islands»

⁶ I.—*Lanzarote*: Lanzarote is not now continually «watered with running water», as Philostratus stated; instead, as explained by a modern guidebook, in the eastern part of the Canaries «the rare falls of rain reach a tropical violence and rush down in torrents into the ravines which they strip completely, submerging the roads which have to be protected by paved foundations». On the other hand, there may very likely have been natural springs in Philostratus' time, especially as the island has since been greatly changed by telluric activity, and «the last eruptions (1730-1736) transformed the former rich agricultural region into an immense sea of lava. Sand banks, driven by the desert wind sometimes cross the island completely from one side to the other». M. W. Schweitzer, *SPAIN* («Hachette World Guides»), Paris, 1961, pp. 993-4 (hereafter referred to as «SPAIN»). That the eastern islands *were* certainly «watered with running water» in Philostratus' time is explained by another specialized guidebook: «In 1404, for example, the conquest chroniclers (like Philostratus before them) wrote of vigorously running streams, and they thought that water-mills could be made in four or five places: a number of salt-saturated trickling rivulets are all that now remains, and even these are still trickling». J. Mercer, *Canary Islands: Fuerteventura* («The Islands Series»). Harrisburg, PA, 1973, p. 10. Other works on the Canary Islands I have consulted include: A Martí, *Islas Canarias* («Rutas de España», XIV), Madrid, 1969 (interesting photographs, but a superficial text); and C. W. Thomas, *Adventures and Observations of the West Coast of Africa, and Its Islands...*, New York, 1860 (esp. pp. 339-405: an interesting example of mid-Victorian, Georgia-Baptist, tourism).

with a deep soil, is inhabited by both fishermen and farmers, who offer each other a market, the latter bring of the fruits of their husbandry, the former of the fish they have caught: and they have set up yonder statue of Poseidon the Farmer (a lighthouse?) with a plough and a yoke, crediting him with the fruits of the earth; but that Poseidon may not seem too much a landsman, the beak of a ship is attached to the plow, and he breaks the ground as though sailing through it ⁷.

(III) The two islands next to these (*Fuerteventura* and *Jandía*; now joined by a sand-spit: *El Jable*) were formerly both joined in one (as today); but having been broken apart in the middle by the sea, its two parts have become separated by the width of a river. This you might know of from the painting, my boy; for you doubtless see that the two severed portions of the islands are similar, and correspond to each other, and are so shaped so that concave parts fit those that project. Europe once suffered the same experience in the region of the Thessalian Tempe: for when earthquakes laid open that land, they indicated on the fractures the correspondence of the mountains, one to the other, and even today there are visible cavities where rocks once were, and which corresponded to the rocks torn from them, and, moreover, traces have not yet disappeared of the heavy forest growth that must have followed the mountain sides when they split apart; for the beds of the trees are still left (on Tempe). So we may consider that some such thing happened to this island (of *Fuerteventura*); with the result that the two islands look like one; and while ships sail under the bridge, wagons go over it; in fact you doubtless see the men making the passage, that they are both wayfarers and sailors ⁸.

The above seems a fairly straight-forward description of the topography of the three eastern most islands of the Canary Archipelago. According to a modern guidebook, these islands are now «without forests or streams, fairly flat, bristling with small craters, cones of ashes and outflows of lava... Only sixty nautical miles from Cape Juby (in Morocco), the westerly African winds sometimes bring swarms of locusts (perhaps the «bees» mentioned above). Rainfall is scanty, but Lanzarote produces abundant harvests in good years... The Tyrians (of Phoenicia) discovered here a rich source of crimson dye,

⁷ II.—*Isla Graciosa*: The thick rich soil referred to by Philostratus is likely: «the ashes (*picón*) taken from old craters, spread on the soil in layers of 8-12 inches into which seeds are sown. Their power to absorb and retain the moisture from the nearby subsoil in the ashy surface is such that one or two heavy downpours a year are sufficient to make the crops prosper». The guidebook also mentions that upon an islet slightly to the north of *Isla Graciosa* — *Isla Alegranza* — was «the lighthouse: this was the first island spotted by Jean de Bethencourt (in 1402), whence its name». I am fairly certain then that the «statue of Poseidon» mentioned by Philostratus (perhaps constructed from wood) served primarily as a beacon for mariners approaching the Canaries from the north-east (SPAIN, pp. 994-6).

⁸ III.—*Fuerteventura-Jandía*: As I have found, the lengthy (and somewhat irrelevant) digression upon the creation of the straits at Tempe was taken from Diodorus Siculus (Book IV, 18, 6 ss.), an historian whose works were, I would imagine, very much on Philostratus' mind. Interestingly enough, not long after picturing the situation at Tempe, Diodorus turns to discuss Hercules' mission to the Gardens of the Hesperides (IV, 26, 2 ss.).

From the differentiated manner of the presentation of the descriptions of these individual islands (eight in all, I think), it appears that, in general terms, the author-cicerone proceeded from the eastern end of the archipelago, nearest Africa—the direction from which any ancient Mediterranean mariner would have inevitably approached the Canaries—and then he proceeded to move island by island—following the distinctive and varying wind-patterns common to each different part of the archipelago—sailing first to the south-west, then a long stretch due west, then south, then east, finally ending up in the exact center of the island-group—where port was made at Grand Canary Island, most likely near the modern port-city of Las Palmas. Once one is informed of the actual places that are being visited and commented upon, then the detailed account of the «NESOI» reads like an actual mariner's log, or «Periplus»—scarcely a surprising or original observation for Philostratus himself says that, in effect, it was such!

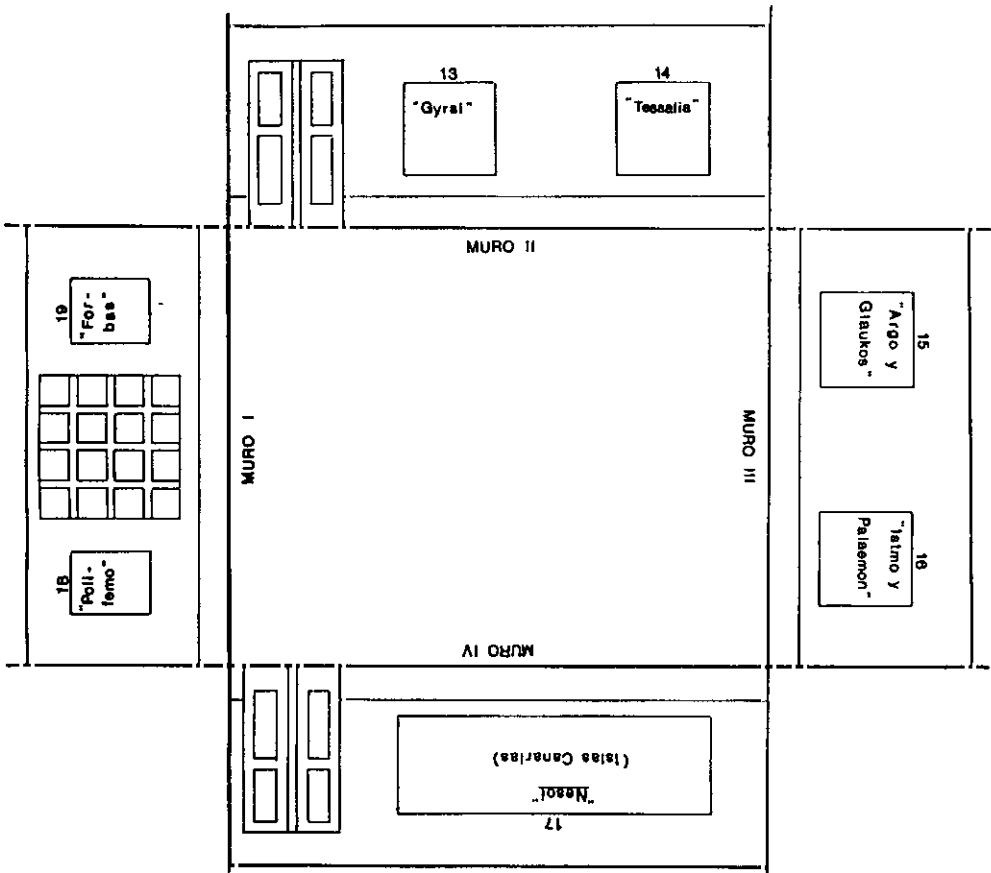


FIG. 1.

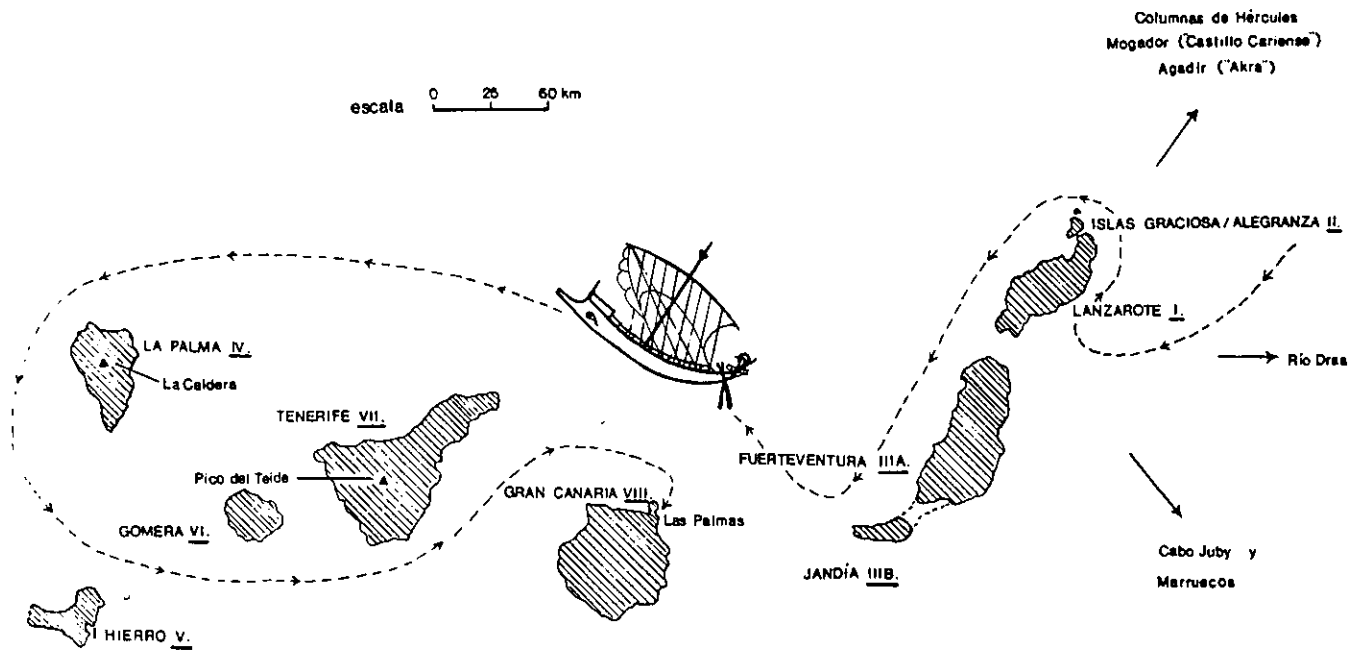


FIG. 2.

extracted from a certain variety of moss («plucked by the Nereids»?) that was particularly abundant on the islands of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura»⁹.

The next island described by Philostratus is radically different from the preceding group; it is, as he puts it, «a marvel». Its distinctive physical characteristics indicate that it is the most north-westerly of the Canary Archipelago: *La Palma*. According to our guidebook, it is an island noted «for the extraordinary beauty of its landscape and, most of all, for the famous *Caldera* in the center of the island; it is the largest (volcanic) crater in the world: 5 1/2 miles in diameter. From the edges of the crater, which tower up to nearly 8,200 feet altitude, with pink jagged crests fringed with snow and crowned with giant pines, we descend into a Dantesque chasm, in some parts 6,560 feet deep, a chaos of rocks and trees and bellow are small farms surrounded by orchards». Certainly this awesome and immense volcano was active in classical times, and parts of the island were recently «devastated by the last eruption in July, 1949»¹⁰.

Philostratus is evidently describing the volcanic isle of *La Palma* where he speaks of:

(IV) The neighbouring island, my boy, we may consider a marvel; for fire smoulders under the whole of it, having worked its way into underground passages and cavities of the island, through which, as through ducts, the flames break forth and produce terrific torrents from which pour mighty rivers of fire that run in billows to the sea. If one wishes to speculate about such matters, the island provides natural bitumen and sulphur; and when these are mixed by the sea, the island is fanned into flame by many winds, drawing from the sea that which sets the fuel aflame. But the painting, following the accounts given by the poets, goes farther and ascribes a myth to the island. A giant, namely, was once struck down there, and upon him, as he struggled in the death agony, the island was placed as a bond to hold him down, and he does not yet yield but from beneath the earth renews the fight and breathes forth this fire as he utters threats. Yonder figure, they say, would represent Typho in Sicily or Enceladus here in Italy (i.e., Naples, the site of the *pinakes*), giants that both continents and islands are pressing down, not yet dead indeed, but always dying. And you, yourself, my boy, will imagine that you have not been left out of the contest, when you look at the peak of the mountains (*La Caldera*); for what you see there are thunderbolts which Zeus is hurling at the giant, and the giant is already giving up the struggle but still trusts in the earth, but the earth has grown weary because Poseidon does not permit her to remain in place. Poseidon has spread a mist over the contest, so that it resembles what has taken place now. This hill encircled by the sea is the home of a serpent, guardian doubtless of some rich treasure that lies hidden under the earth. This creature is said to be devoted to gold and whatever golden thing it sees it loves and cherishes; thus the fleece in Colchis and the apples of the Hesperides, since they seemed to be of gold, two serpents that never slept guarded and claimed as their own. And the serpent of Athena, that even to-day still makes its home (in Athens) on the Acropolis, in my opinion, has loved the people of the Athenians because of the

⁹ SPAIN, pp. 972, 992.

¹⁰ SPAIN, p. 1008. There was another eruption in 1971.

gold which they make into grasshopper pins for their hair. Here the serpent himself is of gold; and the reason he thrusts his head out of the hold is, I think, that he fears for the safety of the treasure hidden below ¹¹.

Now that we have placed our narrator-navigator on the north-western perimeter of the archipelago, it seems logical to suppose that he would have continued his looping perambulations toward the south, then towards the east. This means that the next island to be described by Philostratus' should correspond to *Hierro*, the most westerly and southern of the Canaries. Philostratus explained that the next island after *La Palma* was waterless, rocky and largely treeless, although it was noted for its local wines, and so the place «claims to be dedicated to Dionysius». It is also, as he tells us, foggy and violently windswept from the west. These details also accord with the guidebook description of *Hierro*, where we read how this island is characterized by «the almost total absence of springs, poorly compensated for the dampness of the foggy atmosphere. It has relatively few woods... wine, dried figs, fruit and cheese are the only exports... Before the discovery of America, Hierro used to mark the end of the known world... The Greek geographer Ptolomaeus placed his first meridian here... (One sees) pyramids of ashes in the green fields which are swept by terrible winds... Large fig-trees bend to the ground in little enclosures, which protect them from the goats.

... (There are) huge vineyards which produce a yellow wine, pungent and heady». The natives of Philostratus' island were dancers and revellers, just as were the ancient Hierrans: «Before their conquest by the Spanish, the inhabitants, who called themselves *Ben-Bashir* or *Bimbachos*, were a pastoral people; they had simple customs, loved dancing, and had no idea of either war or money» ¹².

Once again we shall find that Philostratus' description (again with the customary mythic embellishments) closely accords with the details of the modern tourist's handbook's description of *Hierro*:

(V) Canopied with ivy and bryony and grape-vines, this next island claims to be dedicated to Dionysus, but adds that Dionysus is now absent, doubtless revelling somewhere on the (African), mainland, having entrusted to Seilenus the sacred objects of this place; these objects are yonder cymbals lying upside down, and golden mixing-bowls overturned, and flutes still warm, and drums lying silent; the west wind seems to lift the fawn-skins from the ground; and there are serpents, some of which are twined about the thyrsi and others, in a drunken sleep, are at the disposal of the Bacchantes for use as girdles. Of the clusters of grapes some are ripe to bursting, some are turning dark, some are still green, and some appear to be budding, since Dionysus has cunningly fixed the seasons of the vines so that he may gather a continuous harvest. The clusters are so abundant that they both hang from the rocks and are suspended over the sea, and birds of both the sea and the

¹¹ IV.—*La Palma*.

¹² SPAIN, pp. 1013-14.

land fly up to pluck them; for Dionysus provides the vine for all birds alike except the owl, and this bird alone he drives away from the clusters because it gives man a prejudice against wine. For if an infant child that has never tasted wine should eat the eggs of an owl, he hates wine all his life and would refuse to drink it and would be afraid of drunken men. But you are bold enough, my boy, not to fear even the Seilenus here that guards the island, though he is both drunken and is trying to seize a Bacchante. She, however, does not deign to look at him, but since she loves Dionysus she fashions his image in her mind and pictures him and sees him, absent though he is; for though the look of the Bacchante's eyes is wavering, yet assuredly it is not free from dreams of love ¹³.

Having finished with Hierro, Philostratus now swings to the north-east to *Gomera*, again a very different sort of place from the preceding island. As the narrator explains, this island «yonder» (about 40 miles from Hierro) is mountainous, thickly covered with forests providing wood for ship building (especially useful for masts), and it once abounded with wild game. The modern guidebook concurs, noting that, although Gomera has «no definable (volcanic) crater, the island is surrounded by a wall of sheer basaltic cliffs, cut by narrow *barrancos*... The summit of the island, which reaches an altitude of 5,520 feet at Garajonay, is covered between the rocky chains by a fine fertile soil bearing thick forests whose beechtrees are of a size unknown elsewhere». Philostratus also speaks of the yodelling cries of the local hunters, «so that you might say that Echo herself joins in the revel of the hunt». The guidebook states that even today «the inhabitants of Gomera have the peculiar custom of talking to each other by means of the modulated whistling of brief signals. From valey to valley, they transmit messages and warnings» ¹⁴. Here is how Philostratus put it:

(VI) Nature in fashioning yonder mountains has made an island thickly grown and covered with forest, lofty cypress and fir and pine, oaks also and cedar; for the trees are painted each in its characteristic form. The regions on the island where wild beasts abound are tracked by hunters of boar and deer, some equipped with hunting-spears and with bows. Knives and clubs, my boy, are carried by the bold hunters that attack at close quarters; and here nets are spread through the forest, some to surround the animals, some to entrap them, and some to check their running. Some of the animals have been taken, some are struggling, some have overpowered the hunter; every youthful arm is in action, and dogs join men in an outcry, so that you might say that Echo herself joins in the revel of the hunt. Woodsmen cut through the tall trees and trim them; and while one raises his axe, another has driven it home, a third whets his axe which he finds dull from hewing, another examines his fir tree, judging the tree with a view to a mast for his ship, and still another cuts young and straight trees for oars ¹⁵.

¹³ V.—*Hierro*.

¹⁴ SPAIN, p. 1011.

¹⁵ VI.—*Gomera*.

Now, with Philostratus' plot clearly fixed upon the map, there can be no doubt that the next island in the chain of descriptions would have to have been *Tenerife*. As characterized by the Greek, the island is rocky, extremely elevated, and a natural nesting place for swarms of birds. As the modern guidebook explains: «Tenerife is a volcanic formation like the other Canary Islands; in the centre of its largest part rises the enormous crater of *Las Cañadas* (6,560 feet altitude), 12 kilometres wide, in the centre of which is the enormous cone of the famous *Teide Peak*, 12,180 feet high; the peak, visible from far out at sea, has never failed to impress passing mariners..... The whole curved-in part of the north-west shows a profusion of flora and fruit, as in the legendary Gardens of the Hesperides.... Tenerife, very different from the Grand Canary (the last stop on Philostratus' itinerary), has few forests, and these only at the height of *Las Cañadas*»¹⁶. Unfortunately, there is no mention here of the flocks of sea-birds—but the existence of these can be attested to by any modern visitor to the island. Here is how Philostratus described *Tenerife*:

(VII) The precipitous rock and the flock of seagulls and the birds in their midst have been painted for some such reason as this: The men are attacking the sea-gulls, but not, by Zeus, for their flesh, which is black and noisome and unpalatable even to a hungry man; but these birds supply to the sons of the doctors a stomach of such properties as to assure a good appetite in those who eats it and to made them at night. But the gulls induce the tern with a part of the food they catch to act as a warden and to keep awake for them. Now though the tern is a sea-bird, yet it is simple-minded, easy-going, and inefficient at catching prey; but in resisting sleep it is strong and in fact sleeps but little. For this reason it lets out the use of its eyes to the gulls. So when the gulls fly away after food, the tern keeps guard around the home rock, and the gulls return towards evening bringing to it a tithe of what they have caught; they at once step round about the tern, and it stays awake and is never overcome by sleep except when they are willing. If it senses the approach of any danger it raises a piercing shrill cry, and they rise at the signal and fly away, supporting their warden if ever it grows weary in flight. But in this picture it is standing and watching over the gulls. In that it stands in the midst of its birds, the tern is like Proteus among his seals, but it is superior to Proteus in that it does not sleep¹⁷.

As is by now obvious, Philostratus' final stop was at the island called the *Gran Canaria*, evidently the only one at which anchorage was made. Moreover, his mention of the island's famous racing dogs (*canis*) gives us today a very good idea of the etymological source for the modern name of this *Gran Canaria*:

(VIII) On this island, my boy, we have put ashore; and though I do not know what its name is, I at least should call it «golden», had not the poets applied this epithet at random to everything beautiful and marvellous. It is only big enough to

¹⁶ SPAIN, p. 997.

¹⁷ VII.—*Tenerife*.

have a small palace; for no one will plough here or cultivate the vine; but it has an abundance of springs, to some of which it furnishes pure cold water and to some water that it has heated. Let us conclude that it is an island so well supplied with water that the water overflows into the sea. As for this surging water, bubbling springs that leap up and bound on high as from a cauldron cause the rippling waves, and this island surrounds the springs. Now the marvel of the source of the springs, whether one should assume that they come from the earth or should locate them in the sea, Proteus here shall decide; for he has come to render judgment on this point. Let us examine the city that has been built upon the island. For in truth there has been built there a likeness of a fair and splendid city no larger than a house, and therein is nurtured a royal child and the city is his play-thing. There is a theatre large enough to receive him and his playfellows, and a hippodrome has been constructed of sufficient size for little Melitaeans to run races in; for the boy uses these as horses and they are held together by yoke and chariot, and the drivers will be these apes that the boy regards as his servants. Yonder hare, brought into the house only yesterday, I believe, is fastened with a purple leash like a dog, but it objects to being bound and seeks to slip its bonds with the help of its front feet; and a parrot and a magpie in a woven cage sing like Sirens on the island; the magpie sings what it knows, but the parrot what has been taught¹⁸.

As the guidebook states (making, however, no mention of modern dog-races): «Grand Canary has been called “a miniature continent”, because of the contrast between the Alpine nature of certain valleys and the African character of the south coast. The island is almost circular, 29 miles wide and 34 miles long. It forms a volcanic mountainous mass deeply indented by barrancos, the sides of which are often sheer, or hollowed out by former craters. Its highest point, *Los Pechos*, reaches an altitude of 6,496 feet... Woods of laurels, eucalyptus, or magnificent pines cover the peaks and some or the slopes... The island possesses a great number of mineral and hot springs... Scarcely anything is known of the history of Grand Canary before the arrival of Europeans in the 15th-century, except that the natives called it *Tamaram*, “home or the valiant”... On landing at Gáldar, (the first Spaniards) found 600 warriors... and had to seek refuge in a *tagoror*, or council-chamber.» Gáldar, some 30 km. from the modern port-city of Las Palmas, was the ancient court of the Guanche kings («guanartemes») ¹⁹. Gáldar is also very likely to be that «city that has been built

¹⁸ VIII.—*Gran Canaria*.

¹⁹ SPAIN, pp. 977-8. The pre-European population of the Canaries, called *Guanches*, are as unique as the islands which they inhabited. They (like their islands) are easy to recognize in an early 5th- to 6th-century Greek text —there called «*Aethiopes*»— due to their unusually tall stature and fair complexions. According to Scylax (*Periplus*, 112): «And these (western) *Aethiopes* are the tallest of all men we know, taller than four cubits. And some of them are five cubits tall. And they are bearded, and have long hair, and are the most beautiful of all men. And he rules over them who is the tallest. And they are horsemen and javelin-throwers and archers; and (being ignorant of metals) they use darts hardened in fire». When speaking of the eastern branch of this race of such tall stature, the late 2d-century BC writer Agatharchides (*De mari erythraeo*, 49) gave them the leisurely and generous-minded qualities usually

upon the island... no larger than a house», which was described by Philostratus. As I have also supposed, it appears that Philostratus' ship finally dropped anchor in *Las Palmas*, on the north-east tip of the island, most probably in the ancient sheltered port within the modern provincial capital —*el Puerto de la Luz*— where passengers still customarily disembark. Here also Columbus made port in preparation for his momentous voyages to the New World.

As Lehmann-Hartleben had supposed, given the fact that Philostratus was actually describing a real painting, it would be logical to assume that «Philostratus' Marine-Painter» (to coin a name for this otherwise unidentified and talented topographical painter) probably drew upon textual sources —or perhaps even verbal accounts— describing the topography and points of interest in the semi-legendary «Fortunate Islands» beyond the Pillars of Hercules which Mediterranean sailors had been visiting for centuries. Although the first *documented* voyage to these regions is that of the Phoenician sailor Hanno (before 480 BC), it is certain that he was not the first European to know these waters ²⁰. After Hanno's time there are several other accounts of

associated with the inhabitants of the legendary Fortunate Islands, saying they «are said to have limited all useless things, and lack nothing which is fitting, all endeavoring to follow a divine way of life... Since they do not crave power, they are not involved in contentious and unhappy strife... They do not endanger their lives by navigation for the sake of gain, thereby meting out pain through fatal shipwrecks. But needing little, they have few griefs. Gaining a sufficiency, they do not demand superfluities... Therefore, having all that he wants, he is happy according to the logic of nature». These seeming-legends about the tall *Aethiopes*, living in the carefree conditions of a kind of primitive «Golden Age», are substantiated by archaeological finds and historical knowledge of the real, ancient, *Guanches*.

According to our guidebook, «in the 15th-century, the French and Spanish conquerors who set foot on the islands found there a "fair-skinned race, of high stature, who believed they were the last survivors of the world, all the rest having perished". This Guanche race then still lived as in the Stone Age, not knowing of the existence of metal. They embalmed their dead in the Egyptian fashion, and painted their bodies on certain days with designs... Their language, of unknown origin, seems to belong to the Berber and Haitian dialects. Numerous skulls found show characteristics similar to those of Cro-Magnon man... The same race peopled the islands, although navigation and boat-building were unknown to them... The people worshipped one god, "He who is Terribly Great", the Almighty, and practised customs of generosity, courage and chastity which astonished the invaders... Guanche skulls, skeletons and mummies (have been) found in the grottoes or on the battlefields. Certain warriors were as tall as 6 ft., 7 in. ...The mysterious Guanche people... mingled with the Spanish colonizers, whose language and names they adopted, together with their religion. ...In the isolated pueblos, however, one still meets types of mountain-dwellers of very tall stature and light-colored eyes who undoubtedly descend directly from the nature-race of bygone days.» SPAIN, pp. 972, 984, 997.

²⁰ Especially informative on early expeditions to, and knowledge of the regions beyond the Pillars of Hercules are M. Cary & E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers*, Harmondsworth, 1963, stating (pp. 43, 45) that «Atlantic navigation dates well back into the prehistoric era... The Phoenicians probably reached the Straits of Gibraltar soon after 1200 BC». See also A. Schulten, *Tarassós*, Madrid: Austral, 1972, for more on early navigation in Spanish waters, including an interesting examination (which I cannot accept; see note 25) of the Atlantis legend in relation to ancient Tartessós (p. 159 ff.).

trips along the northern African coasts. Curiously enough, as we examine these in detail, we shall find that of all or these it is Philostratus' *eikon* which seems the most coherent of the extant ancient descriptions of the striking appearance of the several Canary Islands! Therefore it is my hypothesis that the Philostratus Marine-Painter also drew upon better or more detailed reports than those written texts which have survived to the present day. Certainly, given the tenuous survival rate of such early documents, this is not an unwarranted supposition.

Hanno's pioneering trip to the south Atlantic, the first actually recorded, is best told in his own words, such as these have survived in a Greek manuscript known as the «Periplus of Hanno»:

The Carthaginians commissioned Hanno to sail past the Pillars of Heracles, and to found cities of the Liby-Phoenicians (i.e., the Tunisian-Carthaginians). He set sail with sixty vessels of fifty oars and a multitude of men and women to the number of 30,000 (evidently an exaggeration, or an error of transcription), and provisions and other equipment.

After putting out to sea and passing the Pillars we sailed beyond them for two days (at this time a day's sail was about 80-90 nautical miles). Here we founded our first city, which we named Thymiaterium (Mehedia). Under it a wide plain opened to view. Thence we stood out westward and made Cape Soloeis (Cape Cantin), a densely wooded Libyan (i.e., north-African) promontory.

Having founded a temple of Poseidon at this point we sailed on for half a day to the east, until we arrived at a lagoon (the marshes of the river Tensift), full of high and thick-grown cane. This was haunted by elephants and multitudes of other grazing beasts.

We skirted the lagoon for about one day's journey. Then we founded sea-side towns which we named Carian Fort (Mogador), Gutta, Acra (Agadir), Melitta, and Arambys.

Putting out from that point we reached a big river flowing from Libya, the Lixus (the Draa, which still carries an imposing volume of water when in spate). Lixite nomads pastured their flocks on its banks. We made friends with them and stayed with them for a time.

Beyond these dwelt inhospitable *Aethiopes* (Berbers-Guanches). Their land is infested with wild beasts and is broken up with high mountain-chains (the anti-Atlas), from which the Lixus is said to flow. These highlands are inhabited by a freakish race of men, the Troglodytes (Pygmies?), who are said by the Lixites to run faster than horses.

From them (the Lixites) we took interpreters and coasted along the desert (the Sahara) southward for two days (passing the Canaries!). Thence we turned back east for one day. There we found at the top of a gulf a small island, with a circuit of five stades (ca. half a mile). Here we founded a colony named Cerne. We estimated from the distance traversed that it lay in a line with Carthage; for it was the same distance from Carthage to the Pillars and thence to Cerne (Herne Island).

From that point we sailed through the delta of a big river named the Chretes, and came to a lake containing three islands larger than Cerne. From there we accomplished one day's sail and arrived at the head of the lake. Beyond this a very

high range of mountains rose like a tower. This was peopled by swarms of wild men in beasts' skins, who drove us off with stones and would not let us land.

Sailing on from that point we came to another deep and wide river, which was infested with crocodiles and hippopotami. Thence we turned back to Cerne.

From Cerne we sailed south for twelve days, skirting the lad. This was peopled all the way with Ethiopians, who ran away from us and did not stay. Their tongue was unintelligible to us and to the Lixites in our company.

On the last day of the twelve we made fast under a high wooded range, with varied and fragrant trees (Cabo Verde) ²¹.

Obviously, Hanno passed close by the Canaries—although he does not make the slightest mention of them. The likely conclusion, supported by other early texts to be quoted here, is that these islands were already so well known to the Carthaginians as not to require further explanation.

The later, semi-legendary «Fortunate Islands»—in Greek, *Kai ton Makaron Nesoi*; in Latin, *Fortunatae Insulae*—are described in the surviving documents (with the sole exception of the *Imagines*!) in such a way as to make accurate identification usually nearly impossible between the three likely Atlantic archipelagos: either the Canaries, or the Azores, or Madeira. The source of this confusion had a lot to do with a general lack of precision concerning the actual *number* of islands described. One such frustrating example is a book by an unknown author called the *Peri thaumsgion akouismata* («Concerning Marvellous Things Heard Of»). It probably refers to another Carthaginian voyage, perhaps as early as the 5th- or 6th-century BC:

It is said that in the sea beyond the Pillars of Hercules the Carthaginians discovered an uninhabited island (or islands!), although one covered with all manner of trees and crisscrossed by navigable rivers (or inlets; also likely considering the extremely shallow draft of boats of the time). This island is noteworthy for its fruits. It was very far from *terra firma*, from which it was several days sailing distance. Its fertility caused the Carthaginians to frequently visit it, and some of them even settled there. But the Carthaginian authorities prohibited further navigation there under the pain of death, even putting the colonists to death in order not to reveal its existence, and there arrived a multitude of other people (evidently the Berber-speaking, very tall, fair-haired *Guanches*; the later inhabitants of the Canaries when the Spaniards arrived), who took over the island(s), preventing the Carthaginians from exploiting it (them) further ²².

Diodorus Siculus, writing much later in the Augustan period (*Library*, Book V, 20, 3), repeated the story of the mysterious Carthaginian colony taken over by a people unknown in the Mediterranean. Although he makes mention of Etruscans with similar designs upon the paradise far out in the Atlantic, he also makes clear that their designs upon these fair shores were never realized:

²¹ Hanno, as. quoted in *The Ancient Explorers*, pp. 63-4.

²² *Peri*, as quoted by Garcia y Bellido, «Las islas», p. 50.

The Phoenicians, who from ancient times on made voyages continually for purposes or trade, planted many colonies throughout *Libye* (meaning north Africa), and not a few as well in the western parts of Europe. And since their ventures turned out according to their expectations, they amassed great wealth and essayed to voyage beyond the Pillars of Hercules (*Erakleiou stelou*), into the sea which men call The Ocean. And, first of all, upon the Strait itself by the Pillars they founded a city on the shores of Europe, and since the land formed a peninsula they called the city *Gaderia* (Cádiz)... The Phoenicians, then, while exploring the coast outside the Pillars for the reasons we have stated, and while sailing along the (Atlantic) shore of *Libye*, were driven by strong winds a great distance out into the ocean. And after being storm-tossed for many days, they were carried ashore on the island (described below), and when they had observed its felicity and nature they caused it to be known by all men. Consequently the *Tyrrhenoi* (Etruscans), at the time (6th-century) when they were masters of the western Mediterranean sea, proposed to dispatch a colony to it; but the Carthaginians prevented their doing so, partly out of concern lest many inhabitants of Carthage should remove there because of the excellence of the island, and partly in order to have ready in it a place in which to seek refuge against an incalculable turn of fortune, in case some total disaster should overtake Carthage. For it was their thought that, since they were masters of the (Atlantic) sea, they would thus be able to move, households and all, to an island which was unknown to their conquerors.

Diodorus also described the delights of the marvellous island(s), which he, of course, only knew of at second hand (V, 19, 1-3):

(After having) discussed what relates to the (Mediterranean) islands which lie within the Pillars of Hercules, we shall give an account of those which are in The Ocean. For there lies out in the deep off *Libye* (Morocco) an island of considerable size, and situated as it is in the ocean it is distant from *Libye* a voyage of a number of days to the (south) west. Its land is fruitful, much of it being mountainous and not a little being a level plain of surpassing beauty. Through it flow (barely) navigable rivers (for instance, the shallow *Barranco Guinguada* on *Gran Canaria*, or the *Barranco de Santos* on *Tenerife*) which are used for irrigation, and the island contains many parks planted with trees of every variety and gardens in great multitudes which are traversed by streams of sweet water; on it also are private villas of costly construction, and throughout the gardens banqueting houses have been constructed in a setting of flowers, and in them the inhabitants pass their time during the summer season, since the land supplies in abundance everything which contributes to enjoyment and luxury. The mountainous part of the island is covered with dense thickets of great extent and with fruit-trees of every variety, and, inviting men to life among the mountains, it has cozy glens and springs in great number. In a word, this island is well supplied with springs of sweet water (or mineral springs) which not only makes the use of it enjoyable for those who pass their life there but also contribute to the health and vigor of their bodies. There is also excellent hunting of every manner of beast and wild animal, and the inhabitants, being well supplied with this game at their feasts, lack of nothing which pertains to luxury and extravagance; for in fact the sea which washes the shore of the island contains a multitude of fish, since the character of the ocean is such that it abounds

throughout its extent with fish of every variety. And, speaking generally, the climate of this island is so altogether mild that it produces in abundance the fruits of the trees and the other seasonal fruits for the larger part of the year, so that it would appear that the island, because of its exceptional felicity, were a dwelling-place of a race of gods and not of men.

Another mention of the (same?) «Fortunate Islands» is found in relation to a story overheard by the notable Roman exile Sertorius; this probably happened around 82 B.C. As told by Plutarch, Sertorius, following a military defeat in Morocco, returned to Spain, landing near Cádiz. There, says Plutarch («Sertorius», VIII, 1-2):

He fell in with some sailors who had recently come back from the Atlantic Islands (*tau Atlantikon néson*). These are two in number, separated by a very narrow strait; they are ten thousand *stades* distant from Africa (an exaggerated figure, equalling around 2,000 kilometers), and are called the Islands of the Blest (*kai onomázontai Makáron*). They enjoy moderate rains at long intervals, and winds which for the most part are soft and precipitate dews, so that the islands not only have a rich soil which is excellent for plowing and planting, but also produce a natural fruit that is plentiful and wholesome enough to feed, without toil or trouble, a leisured folk. Moreover, an air that is salubrious, owing to the climate and the moderate changes in the seasons, prevails on the islands. For the north and east winds which blow out from our part of the world plunge into fathomless space, and, owing to the distance, dissipate themselves and lose their power before they reach the islands; while the south and west winds that envelope the islands from the sea sometimes bring in their train soft and intermittent showers, but for the most part cool them with moist breezes and gently nourish the soil. Therefore a firm belief has made its way, even to the Barbarians, that there is the Elysian Field, and the abode of the blessed, of which Homer sang ²³.

The reference to Homer indicates in a useful fashion the manner in which real geographical localities—known as a rule to these writers only at second hand from travellers' tales—became identified with pre-existent legends. According to the Greek bard (*Odyssey*, IV, 563-568):

The immortals will send you to the Elysian Field, to the boundaries of the earth, where is yellow-haired Rhadamantus. There, in truth, is the easiest life for men. There is neither snow there nor long winter nor even rain, but Ocean ever sends forth the gently blowing breezes of Zephyr (*Zephúroio*) to refresh men ²⁴.

²³ García y Bellido (*ibid.*) mentions a fragmentary text by Sallust (*Historiae*, I, 101) which repeats Sertorius' story, adding at its close, «it is known that these two islands were close to one another, being some 10,000 stades distant from Cadiz, and these spontaneously produced food for men». Although it is commonly believed that the «two islands» mentioned in these accounts refer to Madeira, I am inclined to think them to be Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, which the Phoenicians certainly knew at first-hand.

²⁴ Although I doubt that Homer had any «real» place in mind, in general terms his characterization of the Elysian Fields certainly is applicable to the Canaries (SPAIN, p. 972):

The «Elysian Field», on an island (or islands) in the distant seas to the West, was a motif repeated later by Pindar (*Odae Olympiae*, II, 68-76): «all those souls who... have completed the road of Zeus to the tower of Chronus go where the ocean breezes blow about the Islands of the Blest and flowers of gold are gleaming...» The idea reappears in Hesiod's description of the "Age of Heroes" (*Works and Days*, 60-65), who «dwell with hearts free of sorrow in the islands of the blessed (*makáron nésoi*) by the deep-eddying ocean»²⁵.

The later Greek geographer Strabo also knew of some *Makáron nésoi* — «Fortunate Isles» — that were mentioned briefly in his *Geographiká* (written between 29 and 7 BC). But he too had never seen these isles of the blessed. Nevertheless, he refers (Book I, 1, 5) to «the *Makáron nésoi*, found in front of *Maurusia* (Morocco), towards the limits of the West, by the part where (Africa) comes near to *Iberia* (Spain), and this same name shows that these isles were believed to be fortunate for being in the vicinity of these places»²⁶. Thus, Strabo was the first to identify — in a strictly geographic way — the actual locality of the *Makáron Nésoi* in the place where one today finds the Canaries. As the Spanish editor of Strabo's *Geographiká* makes clear: «the *Makáron Nésoi*, or "Islas de los Bienaventurados" (the Romans called them *Fortunatae Insulae*) are the Canary Islands (*Islas Canarias*). Doubtlessly, these were known in ancient times to Andalusian fishermen who made then, as now, lengthy fishing expeditions, sailing the length of the Moroccan coast down to the Sahara (perhaps even past Villa Cisneros). Punic navigators from Cádiz must therefore have also known

«Exposed to the Trade Winds and bathed by the Gulf Stream, the archipelago enjoys almost perpetual spring conditions... No heating is required in the winter, and the summers are never unpleasantly hot... These (are) *happy islands*, whose natural beauty and originality, together with the inborn charm of the inhabitants form a strong inducement to retain the traveller». It may also be added, as a matter of peripheral interest, that the name of «yellow-haired Rhadamantus» is somewhat like that of the «*Harimiguadas*», the Sacred Virgins of the fair-complected, sometimes blonde, Guanchos, «all daughters of chieftains, who had to submit to the same rigorous chastity as the Roman Vestals... On days of public grief, there were beaten in a procession accompanied by convulsive dances, whilst imploring the clemency of the heavens. They can be likened to the Hesperides of Greek legend». SPAIN, p. 991.

²⁵ Allied to this is the famous legend of the «lost continent» of Atlantis, whose original textual source is Plato (*Timaeus*, 24e; *Kritias*, 114a). A lot of rubbish, of course, has been published about this legend, and these materials are examined in a lively fashion by L. Sprague de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme*, New York: Dover, 1954. If there was a real place which inspired Plato's legend (as I believe), then this is the Aegean island of Thera-Santorini, devastated by a volcanic eruption in the mid-2d Millennium: J. V. Luce, *The End of Atlantis: New Light on Old Legend*, London, 1969. A fascinating exploration of cartographic confusion in regard to the contents of the Atlantic Ocean, extending even into relatively modern times, is found in R.H. Ramsey, *No Longer on the Map: Discovering Places that Never Were*, New York, 1973. Numerous references to the modern (re-) discovery of the Canaries are found in J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, New York, 1963.

²⁶ Strabo's citations have been largely taken from an edition excellently annotated by García y Bellido: *España y los españoles hace dos mil años según la «Geografía» de Strabón*, Madrid, Austral, 1945.

of them, and it was through them that certain notices of these (real) islands reached the Greek and Roman geographers and historians»²⁷.

But Strabo elsewhere champions the traditional link of these islands to the «Elysian Fields» found in the Homeric saga, and in these passages one can again appreciate the manner in which geographical fact came to be inextricably identified with ancient legend (Book III, 2, 11):

It seems that in former times the Baitis (Guadalquivir River) was called *Tartessos* (the «Tarshish» of the Old Testament), and *Gádeira* (Cádiz), and its nearby islands, were called *Erytheia* (the Isla de León)... Eratosthenes is accustomed to call *Tartessos* the region around *Kálpe* (Gibraltar), and calls *Erytheia* «the fortunate isle».

But, as Strabo adds later (III, 2, 13):

Homer had the idea of placing here (on the southern Atlantic coast of Spain) the dwelling-place of pious souls, the «*Elysion Pedion*» (Elysian Fields), where, according to the prediction of Proteus, Menelaus must live some day (and quotes the Homeric passage cited above).

Therefore, anyone who had read Strabo would have known that the «Fortunate Isles», here equated with the «Elysian Fields», were located in the Atlantic directly to the south of, and not far distant from Spain in general, or from Cádiz in particular—in other words just in that place where the Canary Archipelago is actually to be found today.

Somewhat later, the actual location of these Fortunate/Canary Islands was made even more apparent by Pomponius Mela (ca. 50 AD) in his *Chorographia* (III, 100-102):

Past this (the Pillars of Hercules), the coast begins, which turns to the West, bathed by the *Mare Atlanticum*. In the first part dwell the *Aethiopes*. In the middle of this, nobody lives; for this is a region with parched zones and others covered with sand and stones, infested with reptiles (the Sahara). In front of the parched zone are the islands in which it is recalled that the Hesperides had there their dwelling-place. In the sandy region are the Atlas Mountains. In front of these are the *Fortunatae Insulae*, whose soil spontaneously produces a great quantity of fruits, which grow without cease (i.e., all year long), and which serve to nourish the tranquil inhabitants, happier than those who dwell in sumptuous cities. There are on one of these islands, two springs which possess extraordinary qualities: the waters of one of these give to the one who drinks from it a laughing-fit which ends in death, the waters from the other cures this illness. (Further on) to the south, past the regions infested with serpents, are found the *himantopodes* («big-foot men»), whose flexible and curved legs are used, so they say, to slither rather than to walk... (and so forth, ending by describing tropical regions with elephants)²⁸.

²⁷ García y Bellido, *Strabón*, note 365, p. 207.

²⁸ Mela, in *La España del siglo I de nuestra era según P. Mela y C. Plinio* (A. García y Bellido, editor), Buenos Aires: Austral, 1945, pp. 41-2.

But of all the ancient writers (other than, of course, Philostratus!) it was Pliny the Elder who provided the most organized and detailed description of the Fortunate/Canary Archipelago. There are two references to these islands in his *Naturalis Historia*. The first mention (IV, 119) is rather brief, dealing with various island-groups off the Atlantic coasts: «In front of *Celtiberia* (Spain) there are several islands... and before the *Promunturium* (Cape Finisterre), in the region of the *Arrotrebae* (Galicia), there stand the six *insulae Deorum*, which have been called by some *Fortunatae*»²⁹. The second reference to these (VI, 201-205) is longer, more detailed and far more accurate in the strictly geographical sense:

There are those who believe that even further away are the *Fortunatae* and some other islands (evidently referring to the western part of the Canary Archipelago, which had not been yet colonized by King Juba of Morocco). Sebosus himself has come to give their number and distances, stating that *lunonia* (FUERTEVENTURA, closest to the African mainland) is located 750 miles from Cádiz (*a Cadibus DCCL p. [milia passum] tradit*); that *Pluvalia* (HIERRO) and *Capraria* (GRAND CANARY), located further to the west, are found at an identical distance from Cádiz; that in *Pluvalia* there is no water but rainfall; that at 250 miles from this are found the *Fortunatae*, placed to the left of *Mauretania* in the eighth hour of the Sun (*in VIII horam solis*); that one island is called *Invallis* (LA PALMA), on account of its deep depressions, and another is called *Planasia* (GOMERA), on account of its distinctive (*planitas*) character (*... et Planasia a specie*); that the circumference of *Invallis* is 300 miles and that its trees reach a height of 140 feet (a clear reference to Gomera's uniquely immense beech-wood trees). Juba came to investigate these things of the *Fortunatae*: he placed them also to the south and to the west at 625 miles from the *Purpurariae* Islands (in the Mediterranean), located in such a way that one sails to them first by going 250 miles above to the west, then by following an easterly course for 375 miles (this must be an error in transcription for it makes no sense). The first is called *Ombrium* (LANZAROTE), which gives no sign whatsoever of construction, but has on its hills a pool and trees which look like sticks (*arbores similes ferulae*) (surely the agave cacti found in abundance); from the black trees bitter water is extracted and agreeable water from the white ones. Another island is called *lunonia* (FUERTEVENTURA), on which is seen a small temple made of stone. In the proximity there is another small island of the same name («*lunonia Minor*»=PUNTO DE JANDÍA). Then comes *Capraria* («goat-land»), full of large lizards. Within sight of this is *Ninguaría* (TENERIFE), so called because of its eternal snows (*quae hoc nomen nomen acceperit a perpetua nive*; a characteristic aspect of Teide Peak), a cloudy place. Near to this is *Canaria* [which I believe refers again to «*Capraria*»-GRAN CANARIA], so named for the multitude of large sized dogs which it shelters, of which two were brought to Juba; on this island are found traces of constructions. All these islands have an abundance of tree-grown fruits (*pomorum*), as well as all manner of birds. Additionally, this group is copious in date-palms and pines. There is also honey in quantity, and by the streams there grow

²⁹ Pliny, in *ibid.*, p. 144.

papyrus and catfish (*siluros*). The islands are also polluted by the putrefaction of the beasts which the sea constantly casts upon the shores ³⁰.

These, then, are the known textual parallels to the distinctive topographical phenomena encountered in Philostratus' description of the mural depicting the «NESOI» ³¹. As was shown at the outset of these arguments, this painting contained certain striking topographical features, the kind and variety of which are absolutely unique to the Canaries; but, nevertheless, several of the features in the mural do not appear in any of the other surviving written accounts of the marvels in the sea beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Even though Philostratus himself was evidently familiar with the oft-told travellers tales about geological oddities, as well as with the legends of far-away places (notice particularly his appropriation of Diodorus Siculus' account of the devastation of Tempe), there must be another explanation for the textually anomalous, though geographically accurate, landscape features in the painting, and this argument has little to do with texts as such, whether lost or found ³². Could it be then that the «Phi-

³⁰ *Natural History*, in *ibid.*, pp. 150-2. In Latin, the passage reads as follows: «Sunt qui ultra eas Fortunatas putent esse quasdamque alias, quarum e numero idem Sēbosus etiam spatia complexus Iunoniam abesse a Gadibus DCCL p. tradit, ab ea tandundem ad occasum versus Pluvialiam Caprariamque, in Pluvialia non esse aquam nisi ex imbribus; ab iis CCL Fortunatas contra laevam Mauretaniae in VIII horam solis, vocari Invallem a convexitate et Planasiam a specie. In vallis circuitu CCC p.; arborum ibi proceritatem ad CXL pedes adolescere. Iuba de Fortunatis ita inquisivit: sub meridiem positas esse prope occasum, a Purpurariis DCXXV p., sic ut CCL supra occasum navigetur, dein per CCCLXXV ortus petatur: primam vocari Ombrion nullis aedificiorum vestigiis, habere in montibus stagnum, arbores similes ferulae, ex quibus aqua exprimitur, e nigris amara, ex candidioribus potui iucunda; alteram insulam Iunoniam appellari, in ea aediculam esse tantum lapide exstructam; ab ea in vicino eodem nomine minorem, deinde Caprariam lacertis grandibus refertam; in conspectu earum esse Ninguariam, quae hoc nomen acceperit a perpetua nive, nebulosam; proximam ei Canarium vocari a multitudine canum ingentis magnitudinis —ex quibus perducti sunt Jubae duo; apparent ibi vestigia aedificiorum— cum omens autem copia pomorum (recalling (?) the "apples of the Hesperides") et avium omnis generis abundant, hanc et palmetis caryotas ferentibus ac nuce pinea abundare, esse copiam et mellis, papyrum quoque et siluros in omnibus gigni; infestari eas beluis quae expellantur adsidue putrescentibus.» In regard to Pliny's mention of «Goat-Land» (*Capraria*), it is noteworthy that the first European settlers in the Canaries remarked upon the many goats there, and goat-cheese (*queso cabrero*) is still a local delicacy. For the «*vestigia aedificiorum*», and particularly for the «*aediculam esse tantum lapide exstructam*» found on «*Iunonia Mayor*», or Fuerteventura, see Mercer, *Canary Islands*, p. 201 ff., for a listing of the ancient structures found on Fuerteventura; Pliny was probably referring to the great stone wall stretching from coast to coast across El Jable.

³¹ There is one other early text—Lucian, *Veræ Historiae*, I & II—which I have not cited as it is quite clearly a parody on Plato's «Atlantis» and Homer's «Hesperides» (see especially Lucian's mythical «Cork-Town»—*Phello*). Clearly, these stories do not pretend (in spite of their designation as «True Stories») to represent geographical truth; «Alice in Wonderland» is about as «truthful!».

³² As stated earlier (note 4), I suspect that the rendering of the features of the individual parts of the *Nesoi* mural, that is those pertaining to each particular island, would have looked, in regard to style, like the famous «Odyssey Landscape». But this begs the question of the

lostratus Marine-Painter» had himself been a mariner before he took up his evidently able brush?

manner of its overall pictorial organization. As I now believe, this type of composition would have looked very much like the layout of my figure 2, graphically representing the itinerary of a sailing ship passing by the individual islands in the Canary Archipelago. In short, I would call Philostratus' fresco a «cartographic-landscape», with detailed representations (out of scale, of course) of the distinctive topography, flora and fauna of each island. Unfortunately, as only a very few maps from the classical period have survived (see Cary & Warmington, *Ancient Explorers*, pp. 226-7, for these), it is difficult to know just *how* «typical» a kind of cartographic-convention this fresco represents. More than likely, it was once far more common than we now suppose. Moreover, it appears that Philostratus' wall-map found a later echo in a huge painted world-map (completed ca. 1275) which adorned a wall in Hereford Cathedral (Herts., England). Upon this *mappa mundi*, at about the proper place for the Canaries, are shown the «*Fortunate Insulae sex sunt Insulae s(an)ct(us) Brandani*», unfortunately now much obliterated (R. D. Benedict, «The Hereford Map and the Legend of St. Brandan», *Bulletin of the American Geographic Society*, XXIV, 1892, pp. 312-65; on St. Brendan's legendary voyages, see also Ramsey, *No Longer on the Map*, p. 60 f.; and W. H. Babcock, *Legendary Islands of the Atlantic: A Study in Medieval Geography*, New York, 1922, pp. 34-49). The ancient Greek name for these once commonplace pseudo-cartographic representations was *Chorographia* (an is explained as such in Ptolemy's *Geographia*).

