

**Title:** *Islario general de todas las islas del mundo*  
[General atlas of all the islands in the world]

**Date:** 1540

**Author:** Alonso de Santa Cruz

**Description:** This is the greatest work by Seville cosmographer Alonso de Santa Cruz (1505--67). The atlas was begun during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain Charles V and finished in that of his son King Philip II, to whom it was dedicated. It consists of 111 maps representing all the islands and peninsulas of the world, and showing all the discoveries made by European explorers from 1400 to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The atlas begins with a letter by Santa Cruz to the king, in which he justifies his work and explains different geographic concepts. Preceding the maps is *Breve jntroduccron de la sphere* in which Santa Cruz makes a cosmographic description, illustrated by 14 astronomical figures. The maps are organized in four parts: the first deals with the North Atlantic; the second, with the Mediterranean and adjacent areas; the third, with Africa and the Indian Ocean; and the fourth with the New World. The maps include scales in latitude and some in longitude and bodies of water with varied scales and oriented with compass roses. The *Islario general* is the earliest atlas in which paper is used, instead of the parchment/velum that was previously most commonly used for such charts. The design of the maps is more functional, with less attention to aesthetics and more to geographic detail than in the late-medieval *portolan* [nautical] maps and atlases. Scholars have determined, on the basis of the dates that appear in the descriptive texts on the islands, that the maps were made beginning in the fourth decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century around 1539, and that the entire atlas was completed circa 1560. It is highly probable that the *Islario general* was a part of a *Geograffa Universal* that Santa Cruz never finished. Santa Cruz was one of the key figures of the *Casa de Contratación* [House of Trade] in Seville. One of his first works was a set of the spherical charts of the New World. He created various other works on cosmography and geography, such as the *Libro de longitudes*; and on historical themes, including *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos* [Chronicle of the Catholic kings] and *Crónica de Carlos V* [Chronicle of Charles V]. Following Santa Cruz's death, his successor, Andres Garcia de Cespedes, attempted to claim credit for this work. On the cover the name Alonso de Santa Cruz has been erased, Garcia de Cespedes's name is inserted as if he were the author, and the work is dedicated to King Philip III. In the manuscript itself, apocryphal texts have been superimposed over the originals, with the aim of disguising the real authorship and date of creation.

According to Joaquim Alves Gaspar, Alonso de Santa Cruz (1505-1567) was an influential Spanish cosmographer who worked within the Casa de la Contratación and the Spanish court. Although later settling down to pursue a career in Spain, as young man, he participated in the exploration of the Rio de la Plata alongside Sebastiano Caboto, between 1526 and 1531.

The *Islario General* is an ambitious work originally dedicated to Emperor Charles V. This first version must have been completed between around 1541 and 1545, but about twenty years later, the text was revised and the work rededicated to King Philip II of Spain. During the compilation of the *Islario*, the author had at his disposal the resources of the Casa de la Contratación and information from pilots of the Carrera de Indias who, according to specific orders of the Spanish Crown, had to supply him with any and all necessary data. These circumstances lead us to conclude that the work was based on the official geographic information available at the Casa.

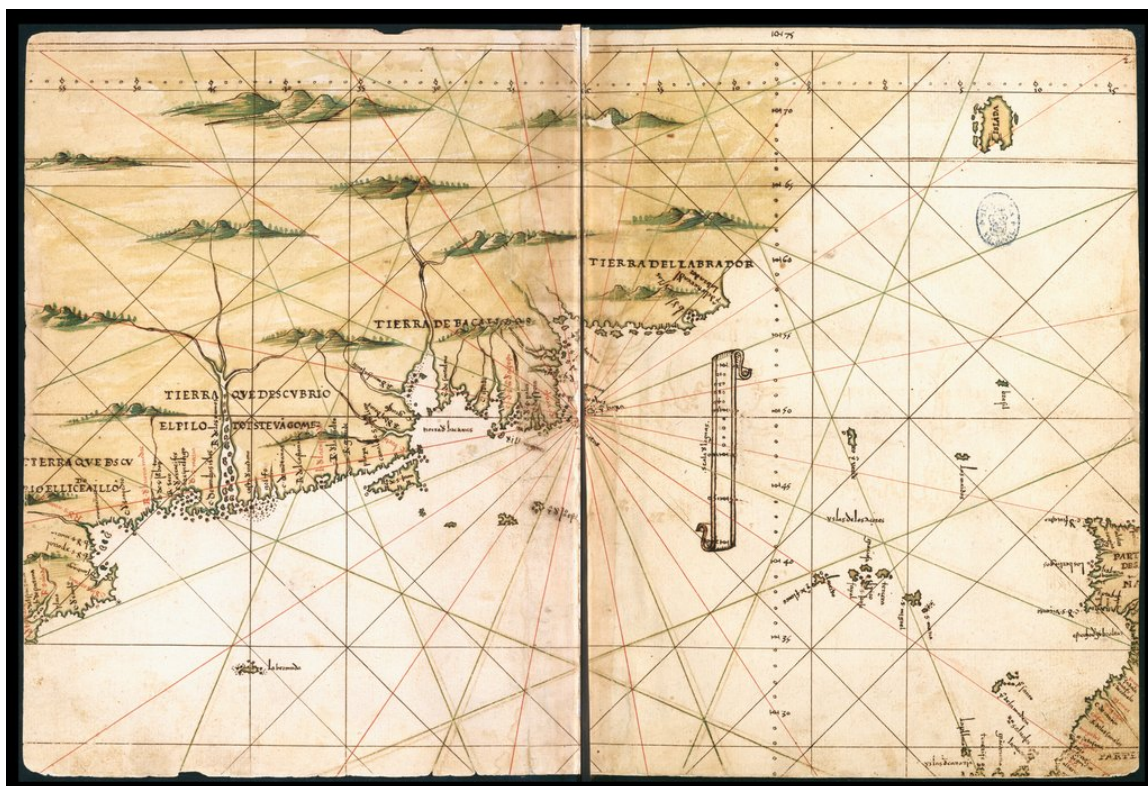
According to Santa Cruz's own explanation, the *Islario* describes, in words and images, the geography of all the islands in the world, including their locations, the routes used to reach them, and their history. The *Islario's* cartography comprises seven regional maps, which cover the known world, and about a hundred larger-scale local maps. According to Maria Luisa Martín-Merás, this set of seven charts must correspond to the *Padrón Real* (the official pattern chart) of the Casa de la Contratación. In terms of the *Islario's* organization, the first two sections deal with the islands of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts of Europe, drawing on long-standing knowledge, and the final two parts address the coasts of Africa, Asia, and the New World. For these latter sections, Santa Cruz made use of the latest information from travelers, as well as his own experience, especially the insights gained on his voyage with Sebastiano Caboto to South America. Regarding the descriptions of the southern coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia, Santa Cruz must have pulled heavily from Portuguese sources, although he does not refer to them.

Through the seven regional maps included in *Islario*, it is possible to reconstruct the planisphere from which they were probably copied. Note the presence of latitude and longitude scales on practically all charts, with the origin of the longitude scale set at the westernmost island of the Cape Verde archipelago (that is, Santo Antão). This detail is certainly not fortuitous, since the dividing line of the *Treaty of Tordesillas* used the same archipelago as its reference. If we measure the longitudinal distance between the *Line of Demarcation* and the Moluccas, we arrive at the surprising value of 214 degrees, wrong by almost 40 degrees. The cause of this gross miscalculation is evident even to the naked eye: in Santa Cruz's maps, the Gulf of Bengal is tremendously stretched in its east-west direction, giving it an added thirty degrees of longitudinal width. Completed shortly after the arrival of the ship *Victoria* in Seville, Santa Cruz was likely influenced by Ptolemy's *Geography*, where the implied width of the Indian Ocean is severely overstated. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that some of the geographic names in Southeast Asia are Ptolemaic. Once again, we cannot rule out the possibility of deliberate manipulation, with Santa Cruz invoking Ptolemy's authority in order to uphold the interests of the Spanish Crown. If that is indeed the case, the fact did not prevent him from, in the two final parts of the work, from openly contesting the legitimacy and veracity of the ancient authors.

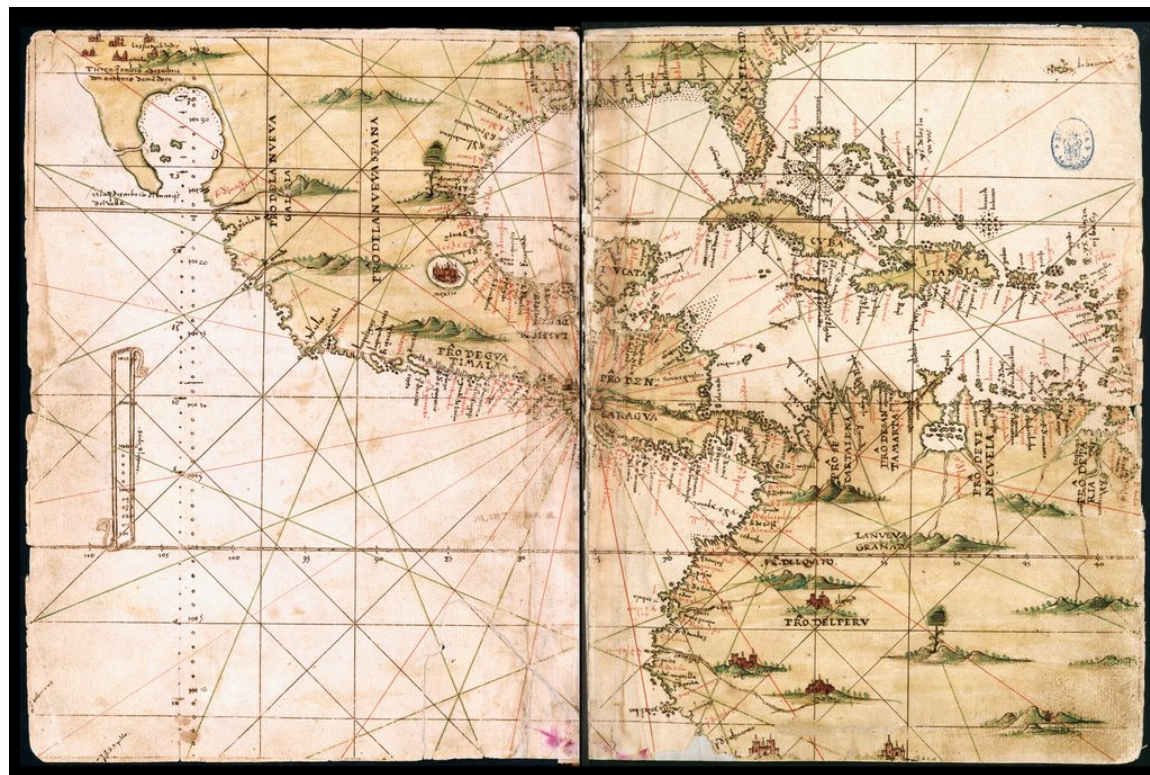
Turning to the representation of Southeast Asia, the cartographer seems essentially to have borrowed the design put forth in the planispheres Diogo Ribeiro produced at the Casa de la Contratación from 1527 on. Consider, for example, their analogous depictions of the Peninsula of Thailand, the north coast of the island of Borneo (mistakenly called *Java Minor*, the name given by Marco Polo to the island of Sumatra), and the Philippines. The shape of the island of Gilolo is somewhat improved relative to Ribeiro's works, and was probably copied from a Portuguese source similar to the atlases of Gaspar Viegas of c. 1537.

#### Reference:

Gaspar, Joaquim Alves and Sima Krtalic, "A Cartografia de Magalhães. The cartography of Magellan", pp. 190-193.



Canada

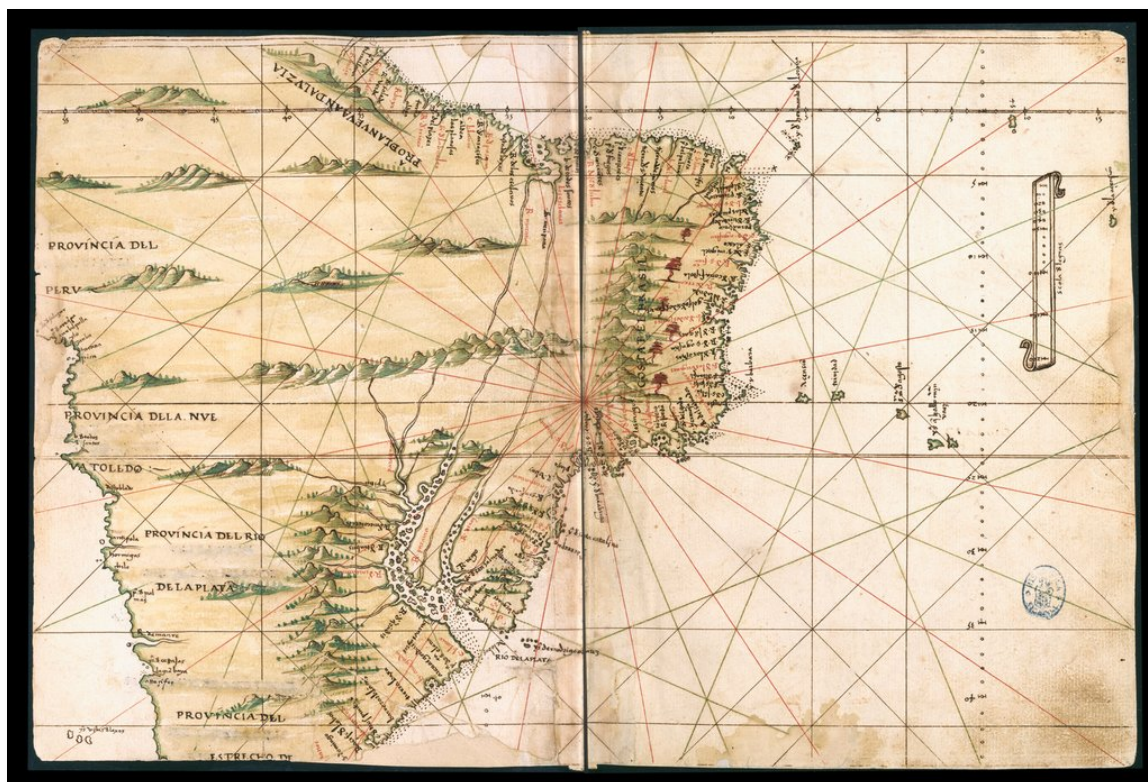


Mexico, Northern South America



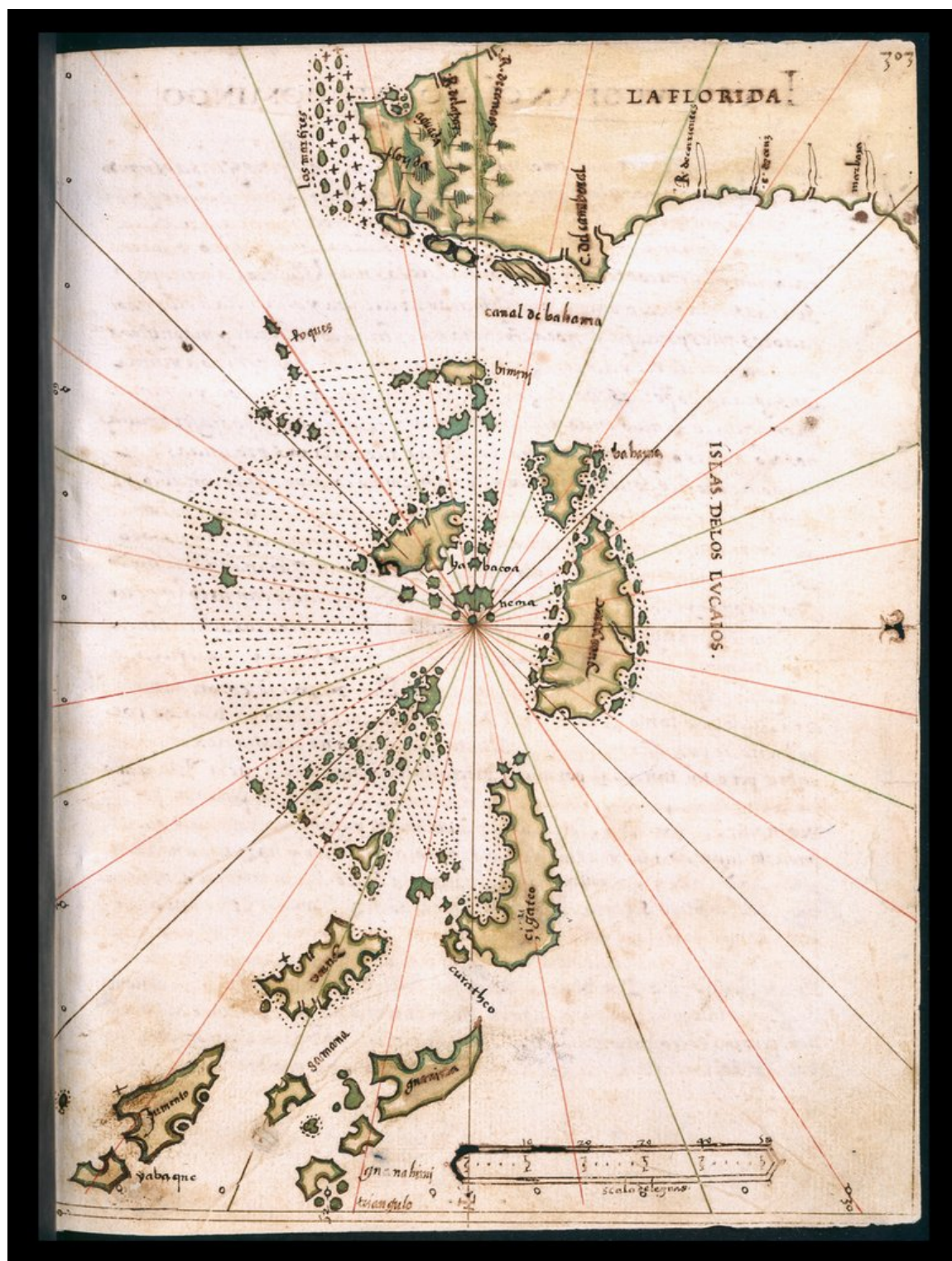


*Gulf of Mexico*



South America





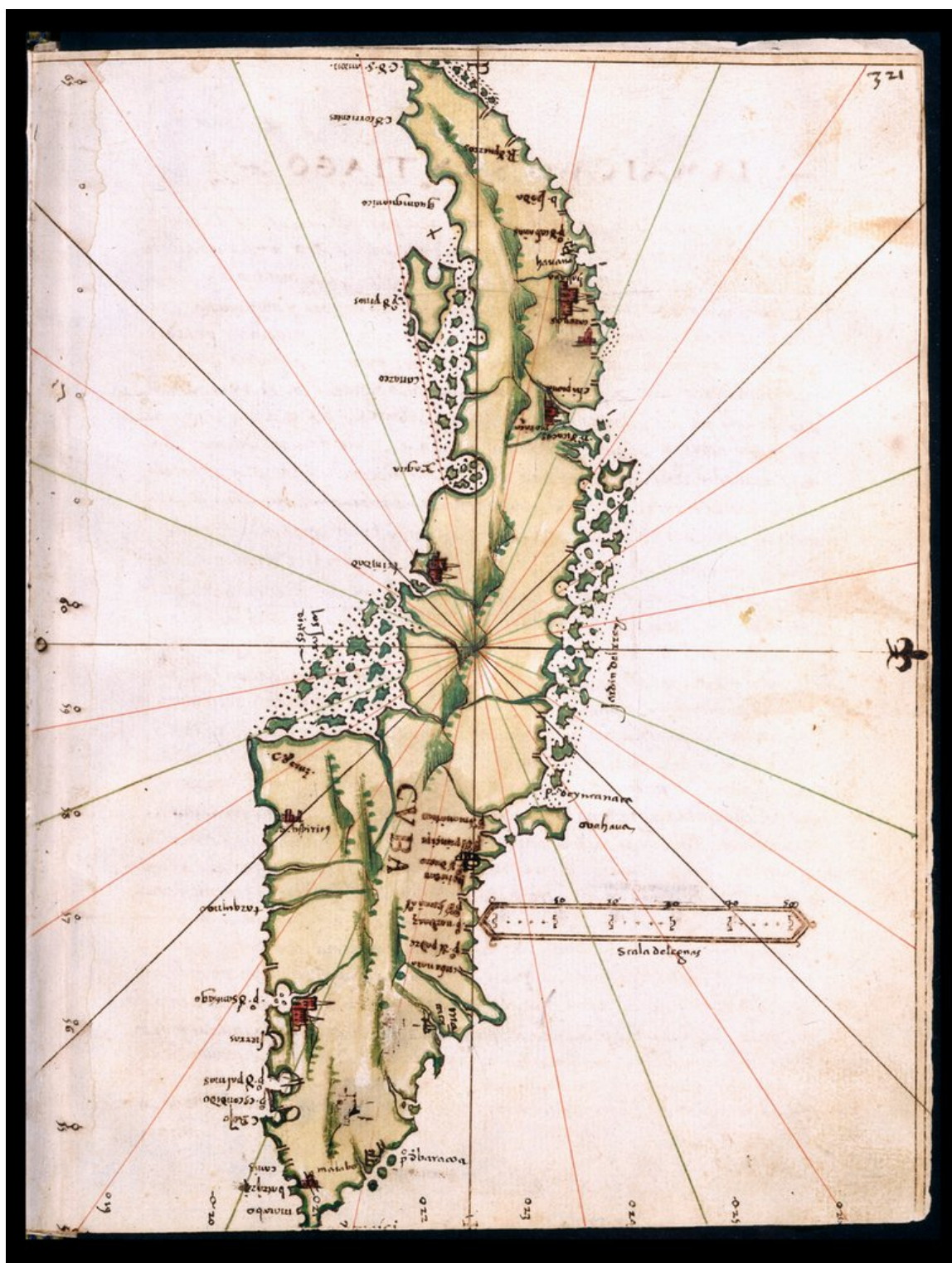
Florida





Espanola





Cuba





*Zipango [Japan]*

A curiosity of *Islario* is the inclusion of a map depicting the island of *Zipango* [Japan], albeit with a conjectural shoreline. It is certainly a representation based on older sources, especially since it is devoid of latitude and longitude scales, and the first documented European visit to the region took place in 1543, likely too recently for any information to have filtered back to Europe.





Greece/Turkey





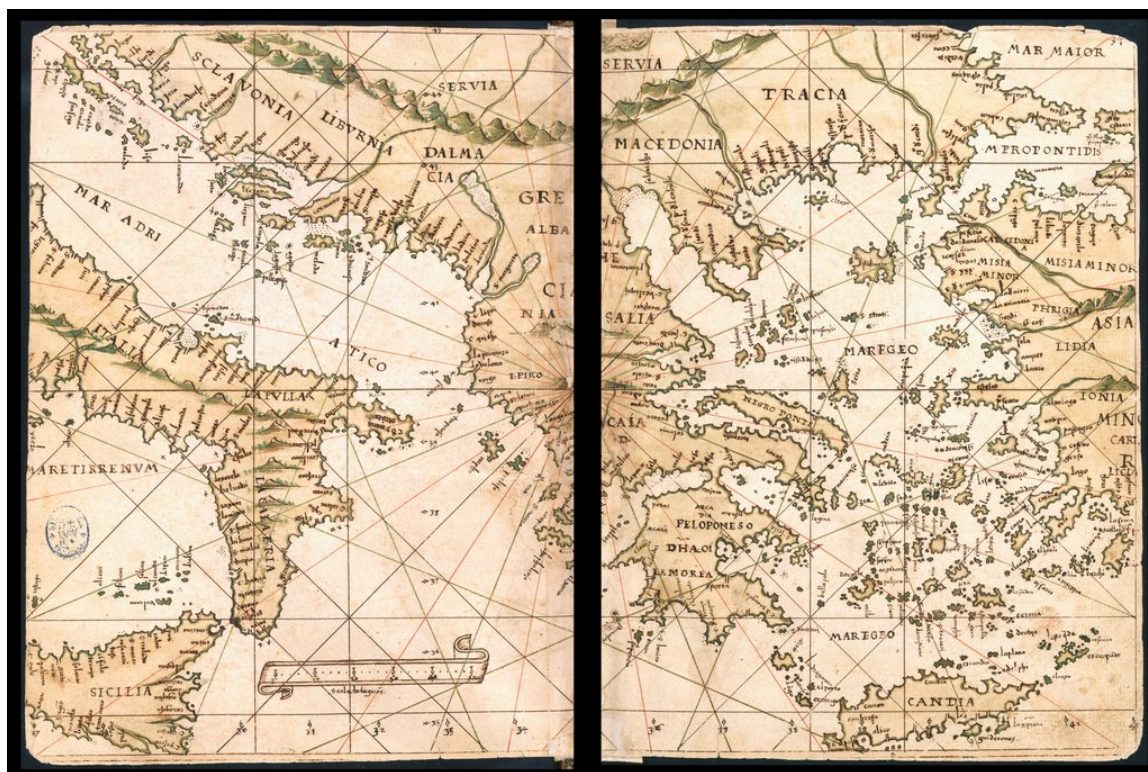
Greece





*Santa Erini*



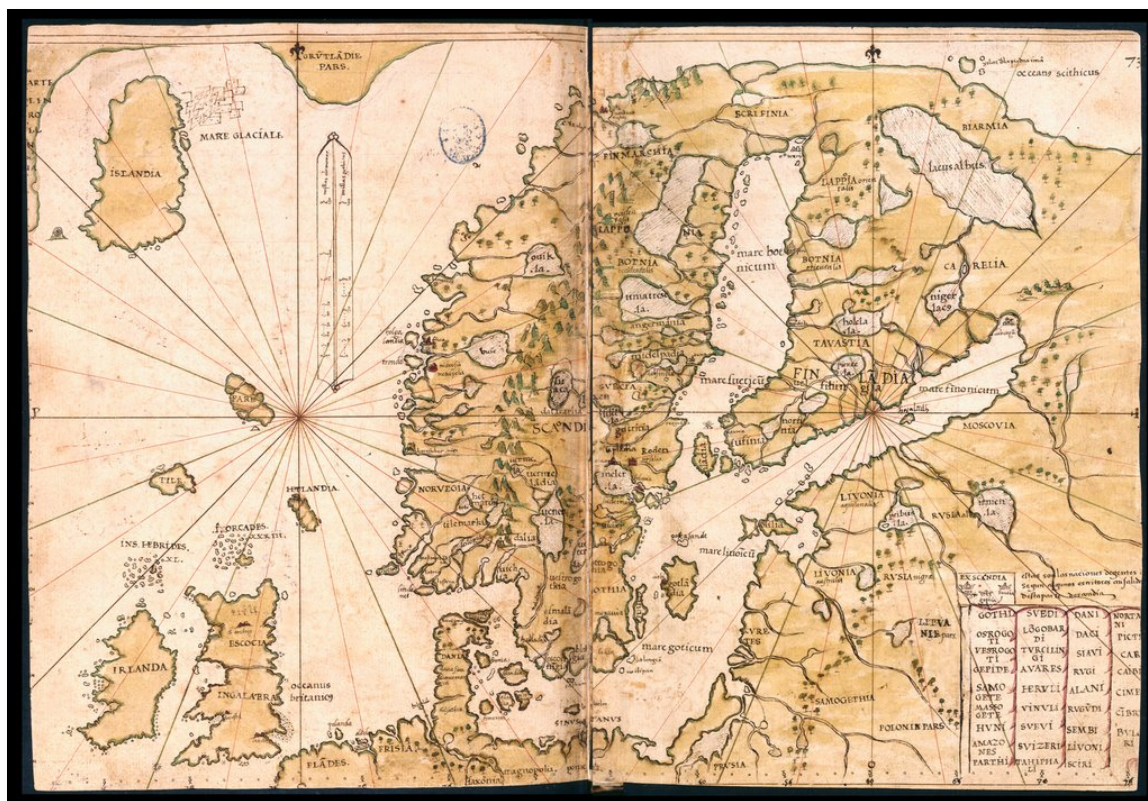




Cerdena [Sardinia]















Ireland





Tile [Thule]



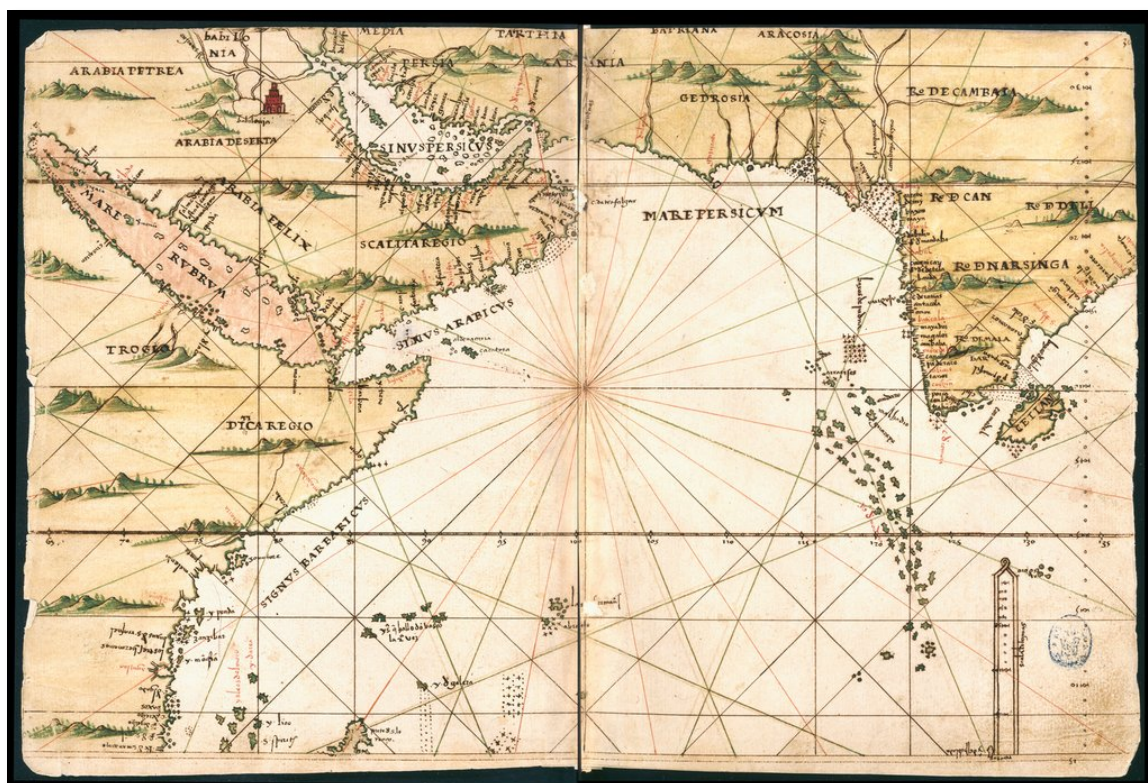


Iceland



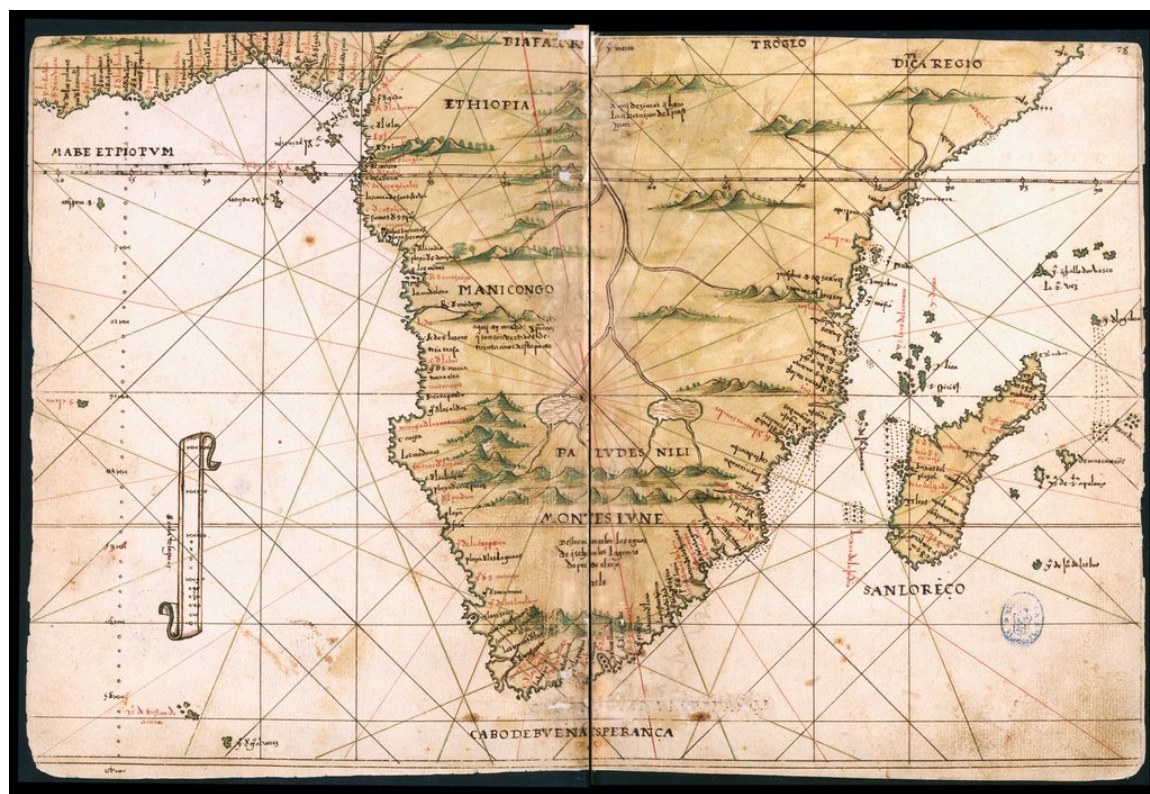


*Southeast Asia*



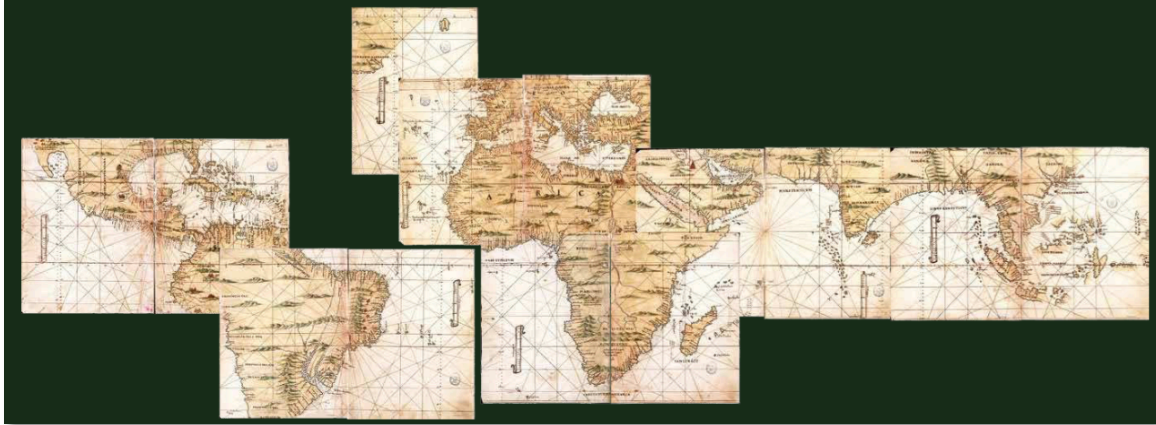
*Indian Ocean*





South Africa





*The planisphere on which the Islario general de todas las islas del mundo (1539-1560) of Alonso de Santa Cruz was possibly based, reconstructed from its seven regional charts. Observe the exaggerated width of the Indian Ocean, based on a Ptolemaic model.  
Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS.MICRO/12638.*