



from

Wreckage: By Sea (i)

The Carte Pisane [c. 1270] and its successors are known as portolan charts—to the annoyance of cartographers, who discern no link between sea charts and the portolani, or written lists of ports, distances, and directions that medieval sailors had long used....On portolan charts, coastal names are tucked away inside the coastal outline wherever possible.

~ Nathaniel Harris, *Mapping the World*

The *portolano* reveals as it hides behind nautical navigation. Trapped (as a map) regal compasses regale ornamental boats, burnt beasts. Copper scales flick forked tongues leeward; star-board, vermilion roses unfurl anthered winds. Thread-thin gales bisect poles, crosswinds tropics, meridians: rhumb lines mar stars flung from seas. Webbing *in medias* to eight, sixteen, twenty-four more: magnetized rays point to ports in *Oriente* and *Ocidente* carving coasts (blank bodies landed: necks, arms, fingers) tattooed with names of harbors and histories: *Safe* or *Risked*. Vellum swells beige, calf-skin radiant from orpiment enhanced by reflection, by light. Oiled dry, the surface thirsts for sun & ink, sunk behind slipsheets. A hammock hangs. Open trunks yield astrolabe, planisphere, cross-staves, quadrant, sextant, octant: measuring distances between stars & this sea.

