Boccaccio's Cartography of Poetry, or the Geocritical Navigation of the *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*

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Fair Greece! sad relic of departed Worth!
Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!
Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth,
And long accustomed bondage uncreate?

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, II LXXIII

This essay offers a reading of the unique encounter of poetry and geography in Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (*Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 1350–1360 ca.). The *Genealogy* features a metaphorical journey through the Mediterranean Sea, and in particular through the archipelago of the Aegean, to describe places where the myths of the pagan gods and their progeny have unfolded. The maritime traveler, speaking in the first person as "Giovanni," traverses "vast regions of lands and the sea" ["vix tam longos terrarium marisque tractus"] (I Preface, I 14), in the manner of a "new sailor" on a "frail skiff," in regions where the poet claims that most of those myths, or fictions, actually took place:

> Iussu igitur tuo, montanis Certaldi cocleis et sterili solo derelictis, tenui licet cymba in vertiginosum mare crebisque implicitum scopulis novus descendam nauta, incertus nunquid opera precium facturus sim, si omnia legero; litora et montuosa etiam nemora, scrobes et antra, si opus sit, peragravero pedibus, ad inferos usque descendero, et, Dedalus alter factus, ad ethera transvolavero. (I Preface, 40)
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> [Therefore, by your order I will leave behind the mountain snails of Certaldo and its sterile soil, and as a new sailor on a rather frail skiff I will descend into the vertiginous sea encircled by ubiquitous cliffs, uncertain as to whether the labor will be worth the effort of reading all the books. The shores and the mountains woodlands, the channel and caves I will traverse by foot if need be. I will descend to the nether regions, and I will become another Deadalus and fly into the ether.] (Solomon, 11)[1]

[1] All quotes are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, ed. Vittorio Zaccaria, vols. VII–VIII, in *Boccaccio tutte le opere,* ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1998) and in English from Boccaccio's *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, ed. and trans. Jon Solomon (Cambridge: The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2011). The latter includes only the first ten books of the *Genealogie*. All quotes in English from Books XIV and XV of the *Genealogy*, unless otherwise specified, are from Charles Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry* ([1930]; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1956). I will only quote from Boccaccio's original text in Latin for essential passages involving my study of nautical images and the roles and tasks of the narrator-sailor.

In the opening of the *Genealogy* the narrator establishes a correlation between his sea-journey and his role as sailor crossing through the books of the ancients as if they were the Mediterranean Sea. In so doing, Boccaccio's narrator embarks on an empirical search for the truth of these largely mythical books, undertaking a hermeneutical, fact-finding investigation of the truths hidden under the "integumentum" ["the covering veil"] of the mythological narratives, or under the fictive trappings of ancient writings,[2] in order to defend the veracity of myths in an operation that is ultimately a defense of poetry, defended against those who say that "poetas homines esse fabulosos" ["poets are tale-mongers, or liars"], their poems being "false, obscure, lewd, and replete with absurd and silly tales of pagan gods," and that "poetry is absolutely of no account, and the making of poetry a useless and absurd craft" (XIV v, 9–10).[3]

In the last book of the *Genealogy* Boccaccio clarifies that his defense of myth is a defense of poetry, understood always in Aristotle's terms of *têchne*, "not a mere art or technique,"[4] but the art of poetic creation, therefore not necessarily and only in verse form.[5] Poetry is "fervor quidam exquisite inveniendi, atque dicendi, seu scribendi quod inveneris" ["fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented"] (XIV VII 1; Osgood xxxv and 39). As Osgood properly writes, "this is a practicing poet's definition, not that of a speculative critic. It inclines rather to the act and experience of creation than to a description of a finished poem."[6]

In terms of valuing "experience" in his concept of poetry, Boccaccio owes his growing inclination towards empirical truth to the teaching of his "venerable" preceptor Andalò di Negro (1260–1334), "the precursor of the scientific experimental method that would be prominent in the fifteenth century."[7] The Certaldese thinks of Andalò, whom he met in Naples where the astronomer moved from his native Genoa in 1318, as an authority on all matters, but particularly on everything pertaining to astronomy, equal in authority to Cicero on oratory and Virgil on poetry (XV VI, 4). Boccaccio celebrates him along with another scientist, Paul the Geometrician, in Book XV of the *Genealogy*, beside Dante, Petrarch, Francesco da Barberino, Leontius Pilatus, and Paul of Perugia, because, unlike the poets—among whom Boccaccio locates himself—who learn by mere hearsay, the two scientists educate themselves through firsthand experience to obtain the truth: "He not only knew the motions of stars according to the laws discovered by the Ancients—which is our way of learning them—but he had travelled nearly all over the world, visiting every clime and horizon, and had used his experience and observation to inform himself

[2] See Peter Dronke on Macrobius, who used the definition of "integumentum" or "involucrum," as a characteristic of poetic and mythological constructions, *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 58.

[3] See Étienne Gilson, "Poésie et vérité dans la *Genealogie* de Boccace," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 2 (1964): 252–282. See the discussion of the "truth" of poetry in Boccaccio's *Genealogy* in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375.*, eds. Alastair Minnis and A. Brian Scott (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988).

[4] Osgood (*Boccaccio on Poetry*, xxxv). On Boccaccio's idea of poetry see also Roberta Morosini, "Boccaccio the Poet-Philosopher of the *Filocolo.* Re-writing *Floire et Blancheflor* and Writing Literary Theory," *Exemplaria* 18/2 (2006): 275–298 and in particular 293–294n39, and EAD, *Per difetto rintegrare. Una lettura del Filocolo di G. Boccaccio* (Ravenna: Longo, 2003).

[5] On Aristotle's *Poetics* and Boccaccio see Claude Cazalé Bérard, "Riscrittura della poetica e poetica della riscrittura negli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio," *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio*. *Memoria, scrittura e riscrittura*, eds. Michelangelo Picone-Claude Cazalé Bérard (Florence: Franco Cesati, 1998), 425–453, 433n16.

[6] Osgood (*Boccaccio on Poetry,* xxxv).

[7] Stephen Grossvogel, "Andalò di Negro," *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 31–33, 32.

firsthand of what we learn by mere hearsay" (XV VI, 4, Osgood 112).[8] Since composing the *Filocolo* (1341 ca.),[9] Boccaccio knows that not all fictions of the classical poets hold up to historical and natural scrutiny (*Geneal*. VII XLI, 3), and this leads him to privilege in the *Genealogy* scientific texts as more reliable sources than poetic ones of the status of myths, from the ancient Hyginus' *Astronomica*, Varro's *De agricultura* and Vitruvius' *De architectura*, to a more contemporary scientist like Andalò di Negro's *Tractatus sphaerae*, a treatise that Boccaccio transcribes in his *Zibaldone mediceo laurenziano* (Plut. XXIX, 8). In the manner of Dante's *new* Odysseus, the narrator-sailor "gains experience of the world" ["divenir del mondo esperto"] (*Inf.* XXVI 98), or of poetry, firsthand, on a sea-journey through the literary past and its geographical residues, through the fiction of the text, successfully entering the Ocean by means of the same "piccioletta barca" (Dante, *Par*. II 1), the same little skiff that Dante did not believe would ever make it without risking to render its sailors "smarriti" (lost, *Par.* II 5) like Odysseus himself (*Inf.* XXVI):[10] "Sulcanti michi exiguo cortice errorum vetustatis salum et ecce inter aspreta scopulorum et frequentia freta" ["While plowing the sea of the errors of antiquity in my small bark, behold, between the rough parts of cliffs and numerous straits"] (III Preface, 1).

What should one make of the writer Boccaccio's sailing and visiting all these ports? What is the role and objective status of the sea-journey and the nautical images in his defense of the veracity of classical poetry? Through a geocritical approach[11] that seeks to understand Boccaccio's "spatial engagement with poetry,"[12] my essay traces the sailing itinerary of the *Genealogy* with the objective of showing the structural role of *navigatio* as an *iter in veritatem*, an itinerary central to the ultimate goal of the work: to assess the empirical truth of poetry by defending and proving the veracity of myth. I argue that Boccaccio conceives of the narrator's "indefessa navigatione" (relentless voyage, XIV Preface, 1) as an "indagatione" (a quest, an exploration, XIV Preface, 1), which, as Northrop Frye posits of physical journeys in a literary text, is a metaphor for progression,[13] in this case a progression throughout the realistic space of the Mediterranean Sea, in order to *perquisire*,[14] like the Dantean Odysseus: to travel in order to look for—to search for in order to gain—the truth of mythology.

The fact that this sea-crossing is a quest into the genealogy of the gods and their descendants is clearly stated in the opening lines of Book X dedicated to Neptune and to the Mediterranean, and is underscored by the reiteration of the verb *exquirere* (to inquire): "Cuius quoniam prolem explicaturus sum, libuit me ipsum per eius beneficia circumagere pauculum ut, si dum aliorum navigans posteritates exquirens se absque periculo cymbule mee sulcare permisit, nunc exquirenti suam tranquillum se prebeat" ["Because I am about to explicate his (Neptune's) progeny, it gave me the opportunity to survey his benefits a little so that, if while navigating to

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[8] Bosisio properly associates Boccaccio's celebration of Andalò and his growing empirical approach with "una strategia già umanistica." See Matteo Bosisio, "*Colenda poesis, et inde poete* (*Gen. deor. gent*., XIV 22, 11). Boccaccio, la novità della letteratura e la libertà dei poeti," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 34/1 (2013): 7–36, 34.

[9] See Claude Cazalé Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica: Mercurio, Orfeo e Giasone tre chiavi dell'avventura ermeneutica," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 277–306.

[10] I will return to Dante's Odysseus and to how both poets, Dante and Boccaccio, succeed where Odysseus fails.

[11] See Jean Marie Grassin, *Pour une science des espaces littéraires*, in *Le géocritique mode d'emploi*, ed. Bertrand Westphal (Limoges: Pulim, 2000), 1, and Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique*. *Réel, fiction, espace* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2007).

[12] *Spatial Engagement with Poetry* is the intriguing title of a fascinating geocritical study by Heather H. Yeung (NYC: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018) which enquires into the construction of space in poetry.

[13] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 186–187.

[14] On *perquisire* and *quero* see Vladimir N. Toporov, "In che direzione navigheremo noi?," *Pothos. Il viaggio, la nostalgia*, eds. Fabio Rosa and Francesco Zambon (Trento: Università degli Studi, 1999), 47–59.

inquire into the posterity of others he allowed my small skiff to sail his seas without danger"] (X Preface, 6). Giovanni "plows" the salty sea of ancient texts in search of the truth of myths, or the veracity of poetry, by means of the "small boat" that is his study, the *Genealogy* itself. Sailing and the numerous nautical metaphors throughout the prefaces of each of the work's fifteen books, and its conclusive chapter, serve a strictly functional role in the poetic project of the *Genealogy*.

While scholars have discussed the role of Boccaccio's narrator as poet-theologian, devoting their attention especially to Books XIV and XV, which are openly in defense of poetry, as though they were separated from the rest of the *Genealogy*,[15] others have emphasized the historical-genealogical structure of the work and its sources.[16] Still others, like Charles G. Osgood, are very clear that the *Genealogy* was not meant "merely to rehearse the ancient myths, nor to arrange them genealogically in as articulate a system as the discrepant accounts would permit" (xv).[17] No scholar, however, has explored the implications of the nautical motive that runs through the work and appears with the image of the narrator/sailor. The insistence on the presence of the "little (or frail) bark" in the proem, which in Book XIV receives the laurel from the poet-captain, should be a telling sign that this boat is Boccaccio's *Genealogy*, namely a poetic creation that is ultimately poetry itself. In fact, with the exception of the aerial travel where the narrator as "another Daedalus" (Book XI) sees the descendants of Jove, the preface of each book of the *Genealogy* is introduced by nautical images. The narrator is a seafarer who heads each time towards a new coastline, towards a location and a route determined by the pagan gods or their progeny who are related to that area. Certainly, one could list numerous other loci in which sailing occurs in the works of Boccaccio, from *Filocolo* to the *Chiose del Teseida* and the *Fiammetta*. We would soon gather that we have to do with a *topos*.[18]

In light of this premise, this essay addresses several related critical problems concerning the recurring nautical imagery of the text. First of all, it examines the spaces crossed by the boat in order to establish this text's understanding of the ends of poetry. The word *ends* is intended not only in spatial terms, as the object of sailing and all the aquatic images, but also as a pointer to Boccaccio's delimitation of the dual objectives of poetry—namely (a) to be useful, as clearly demonstrated in "Poesim esse utilem facultatem" ["Poetry is a useful art"] (XIV VI), and (b) to give unity to phenomena that lack this unity. Secondly, my essay aims to show that the *Genealogy*'s metaphor of the sea-journey creates a veritable cartography of poetry—a unique humanistic space in which the author rescues the relics of a shipwrecked past by mapping spaces and places of civilization. Thus, I argue that Boccaccio's cartography of poetry in the *Genealogy* visualizes on a literary map concrete spaces of poetry while also composing a poetry of these

[15] See the latest study on the *Genealogy*, also for a rich and updated bibliography: Bosisio, "*Colenda poesis*," to which must be added Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Boccaccio the Mythographer of the City," *Interpretation and Allegory. Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. Jon Whitman (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 349–364.

[16] Manlio Pastore-Stocchi, "Giovanni Boccaccio. *La Genealogia deorum gentilium*: una novità mitografica," *Il mito nella letteratura italiana. Dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, eds. Piero Ghibellini, Gian Carlo Alessio, Raffaella Bertazzoli, vol. I (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 229–245.

[17] Although Osgood (*Boccaccio on Poetry*, xv) believes that "the obvious approach to Boccaccio's defense of poetry and the classics in books XIV and XV" should be "by way of his treatment of his material, that is poetic fable, in the preceding thirteen books," he ends up translating only the last two books, XIV and XV.

[18] The notion of *topos* used here is the one coined by Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, ed. Charles Burrow ([1943]; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013). For more on the *topos* of the nautical image in Dante's *Commedia* see Roberta Morosini, "Il mare e la navigazione nella *Commedia*," *Racconti del mare salato. Spazi, itinerari e attraversamenti del Mediterraneo da Dante a Petrarca e Boccaccio* (Rome: Viella, 2019).

spaces, showing that both geography and poetry, places and stories, contribute to the narration of human history.

At the request of the king of Cyprus, who assigns him the task to write this *Genealogy*, the poet classifies the intricate world of ancient mythologies with the intent to impose order on their myths and to give unity to the scattered fragments of their legacy. This is confirmed by Boccaccio the poet-geographer of the *Genealogy* who, following Petrarch and Dante,[19] reiterates the idea that poetry is mainly an art of *colligere* (I Preface, 40), of organizing and unifying scattered dimensions of knowledge; yet differently from his two predecessors, and following classical geographers, he does so through the narrative of a maritime travel to the sites of myths. As Boccaccio undertakes the task to bring clarity and order into the vast and confused repertory of mythology, he brings about the order he seeks, providing unity to mythology in order to defend the veracity of poetry through spatial inquiry. As I will discuss later, Boccaccio believes that geography, like poetry, is itself in service of order and unity, systematizing things and articulating a vast knowledge of places, where humans live and leave traces of their history, a stance that led the Certaldese, even before the *Genealogy*, to conceptualize the geographical treatise *De montibus*[20] in terms of a "dictionary" of mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas of the world.

It is clear then that Boccaccio chooses the metaphor of the sea-journey in the *Genealogy* because it allows places to be located. Here, however, location is understood less "as an analytic, descriptive concept as it was for the classical geographers" (familiar to Boccaccio in his *De montibus*) "than as a tool of criticism,"[21] a tool that becomes strictly functional in establishing the truth of poetry. When Boccaccio specifies the origins of a city, a river, or a sea, he offers a starting point for "locating" the spaces and limits of poetry. The reader sees a sailor worn out by sailing (*Geneal.* V Preface, 1) and even risking shipwreck (*Geneal*. Book IV), as if he were a real sailor crossing the sea on a real boat, in an attempt at realism that should make him a "real" witness and grant credibility to his report to the king who has commissioned this work.

The poet-sailor, in reaching those places and suffering all the risks and perils of the sea, storms, winds, and risks of shipwreck, becomes an eyewitness to the veracity of the myths narrated by the poets and their long-lasting life, assessing their credibility. The most recurring verb that accompanies the sailing is "to see," which is followed by the act of writing, which records those fragments and gives unity to them. In Book III, for example, as the narrator is sailing through the rough parts of cliffs and numerous straits, Numenius, an elderly philosopher considered in his era to be an illustrious authority, poses a challenge to the maritime traveler. The philosopher accuses the author-captain that by sailing in search of the locations of the myths (the "poetarum claustra") he is dragging the Eleusinian goddesses out from their secluded spot and profaning them like prostitutes. He warns the seafarer not "to reveal to the uninitiated the

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[19] See Laura Chines, "Petrarca, Boccaccio e le favole antiche," *Intersezioni, rivista di storia delle idee* 31 (2011): 197–206, 204–205. On Dante's idea of poetry and the unity of knowledge, see Roberta Morosini, *Dante, il Profeta e il Libro. La leggenda del toro dalla Commedia a Filippino Lippi, tra sussurri di colomba ed echi di Bisanzio* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2018); Albert R. Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Teodolinda Barolini,"Ricreare la creazione divina: L'arte aracnea nella cornice dei superbi," in *Studi americani su Dante* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), 145–164, and her *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[20] Giovanni Boccaccio, *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus et de diversis nominibus maris,* ed. Manlio Pastore Stocchi, vol. VII–VIII in *Boccaccio. Tutte le opere*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1998). Hereafter cited as *De montibus*. Translations from this work are mine.

[21] Lukermann, "The Concept of Location," 194.

cloisters of the theological poets" (III Preface, 1), for in doing so he would disclose the mystery hidden in ancient fables intended only for the few. Numenius, in fact, had himself abandoned that same enquiry, stating that it is up to philosophers, not poets, to search for the truth of the myths. Numenius wished not to displease the gods and incur greater indignation. This strategic encounter allows Boccaccio to associate himself with the philosophers and their duties, which are similar to those of poetry, namely, to establish profound truth. Giovanni is not interested in opening the bedrooms of the goddesses or uncovering the hiding places of the gods; rather, he only wants "to look" at their enticements more closely. This is the main motivation of his travels which leads Giovanni to entrust to the pen the experience and memory of what he has seen during his journey. This is Boccaccio's empirical project: he has all the required abilities to understand what he has seen, to remember what he understood, and more importantly, "in opus collecta deducere" (I Preface, I 15): to set all he has seen down in writing and organize it into one work, even if he tries to convince the king that he is not up to the task:

> Concedam amplius; detur qui velis hec omnia posse contingere in momento loca et, divina super favente gratia, caractherum ac ydiomatum variarum nationum notitia, et coram accedenti integra preparentur volumina; quis, ut me pretermiserim, mortalium erit cui sint vires tam solide, tam perspicax ingenium tanque tenax memoria, ut omnia videre queat apposita, et intelligere visa et intellecta servare, et demum calamo etiam exarare et in opus collecta deducere? (I Preface, I 14–15)
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> [I will concede further: if someone were to be given the ability to have all these places accessible in a moment and, with divine favor, knew of the characters and changes and traits of the various people, and was supplied with whole books when required, what mortal—do not include me—would have such considerable abilities, natural insights, and tenacious memory to envision all that was required, and then to understand what he had seen and to remember what he understood, and, finally, to set it all down in writing and organize the work.] (Solomon, 9)

The sea-journey, in other words, serves to suggest that if a site where a myth took place still exists and can be empirically reached, just as one can reach Certaldo, a reference to Boccaccio's hometown and the river Elsa which purposely opens the *Genealogy*, then that myth can be considered "true." This is how Boccaccio extends a map of poetry, which then finds its location—its "philosophical *where*," in the eloquent definition given by the geographer Fred Lukermann.[22] By positioning myths among rivers, seas, mountains, and cities, Boccaccio provides a material cartography of poetry.

What Thomas Harrison argues in his "The Architectural Word" can also apply to Boccaccio, for whom both poetry and geography, like architecture, tell stories of the world and the spaces that people occupy in it: each map, like "each urban project, links spaces [and] establishes points of contacts: literature does the same in discursive terms, unfolding the nature of human

[22] Fred Lukermann, "The Concept of Location in Classical Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51/2 (1961): 194–210. Lukermann states that "in classical geography, location was used to describe relation, quantity, and process. It was the philosophical *where*" (194).

contacts."[23] In the fiction of the *Genealogy*, the poet travels to those places to observe and collect those stories firsthand. But often history and fables are mixed, and Boccaccio's intent in the *Genealogy* is to "sail" to the sites in question and to organize the stories of the myths in space in order to render their meaning clearer and more rational: "Que tam multa cum hystoriis et fictionibus mixta sint, de eis seriosius advertendum est" ["Of these things mixed of history and fiction a fuller and more ordered account is necessary"] (XI XXVI, 2). Considering what Fred Lukermann says about topography in classical geography as "the order of discrete units one to the other,"[24] we can also detect the structural role of the Mediterranean in the text[25] as a space of reunion, bringing together all the sites and relics of the past into a poetry and cartography providing unity to knowledge.

The *topoi* of the ship and of sailing are thus absolutely essential to Boccaccio's genealogical plan. That plan is understand the nature of myths and to prove the geographical truth of poetry along an itinerary that takes into account the genealogy of the pagan gods at the same time that it produces a document confirming the relative truth of myths—and in turn the truth of poetry. As suggested by the geocriticism of Robert Tally,[26] one advantage of studying the relations between space, place, mapping, and poetry is to display the paratextual role of the map as an organizing principle of narrative and its anthropological interrelation with histories of people and places.[27] Boccaccio's mapping of the locations of myths, aiming to show that some stories conveyed by poets really happened, turns geography into an integral part of the discourse he develops in the *Genealogy*. The poet-geographer of *De montibus* had already figured this out when he prepared entries for the treatise in which "he undertakes an itinerary through the places of the myth, of history and poetry."[28] It is the same itinerary that Boccaccio names at the beginning of the *Genealogy* in speaking of the "itineris principium" of his descent into the abyss of earth ["the beginning of his itinerary"] (I Preface, II 15).

Spaces of Poetry and Poetry of Spaces

The author sets out a spatial context for the truth of myths in the first book of the *Genealogy*. Speaking in the first person, he says that he descends from the hard stones of his hometown, the hill of Certaldo, through the rivers Elsa and the Arno, to accomplish a twofold task assigned to him by King Hugo of Cyprus and Jerusalem, to whom the *Genealogy* is dedicated. The king had sent Donnino of Parma, his secretary, to Boccaccio, "the most knowledgeable and erudite man in such matters," ["quasi expertissimum atque eruditissimus hominem in talibus, selectum tanto opera autorem"] (I Preface, I 1), to write a synthetic compendium of the pagan gods and their progeny as narrated in the fables of the ancients and to account for what the wise men of the past

[23] Thomas Harrison, "The Architectural Word," in *Inquieto pensare. Scritti in onore di Massimo Cacciari*, eds. Emanuele Severino and Vincenzo Vitiello (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2015), 271–282, 275.
[24] Lukermann, "The Concept of Location," 194.
[25] A recent study of the Mediterranean in the *Decameron* contributes to explorations of the Mediterranean as Boccaccio's privileged narrative space, in Morosini, "What a Difference a Sea Makes in the *Decameron*. The Mediterranean, a Structural Space of the Novella," *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, ed. Kathrine Brown, 32/8 (2018): 7–51.
[26] Robert T. Tally Jr., *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and in particular his "On Literary Cartography: Narrative as a Spatially Symbolic Act," *New American Notes Online* 11 (2011), https://nanocrit.com/issues/issue1/literary-cartography-narrative-spatially-symbolic-act (accessed on February 9, 2019).
[27] See David Lummus, "Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*," *Speculum* 87/3 (2012): 724–765.
[28] Pastore-Stocchi, *De montibus*, 1817.

found "sub ridiculo cortice fabularum" (I Preface, 16)—namely, to "explain the meaning wise men had hidden under the foolish outer layers of these inane fables." Giovanni understands what is hidden beneath the king's request: he seems to believe that the "insaniam veterum" (I Preface, I 4), the foolishness of the ancients, who considered themselves descendants of the gods, as the fables of the poets had it, "occupied only a small corner of the earth" (I Preface, I 4), which did not last long because of its foolishness.

In order to prove the contrary to the king, Boccaccio the author decides to undertake "a new journey," a maritime journey through the many books of the ancients, as if *they themselves* were the *mare magnum*, the Mediterranean sea,[29] where most of their fables unfolded: "Mare magnum et dissuetum navigiis intraturus novumque sumpturus iter, ratus sum prospectandum fore solerter quo ex litore cymbe proresia solvenda sint, ut rectius, secondo spirante vento, eo devehar quo cupit animus" ["About to begin a new journey and embark upon a great sea unaccustomed to navigation, I thought I should use my skill and survey from which shore I should loosen the prow of my skiff in the hope that a favorable wind might better convey me where my spirit desires"] (I Preface, II 1).

Moreover, as Giovanni tries to anticipate to the king that the "contagione" ["the infection"] (I Preface, 5) spread to wide regions of earth through the waves of the sea, he delimitates those regions in relation to the Mediterranean and beyond: "nec Mediterranei tantum maris fuit contenta litoribus; quin imo et ad incognitas mari nationes etiam penetravit" ["the contagion was not contained only by the shores of the Mediterranean sea, since it penetrated even to peoples unfamiliar with the sea"] (I Preface, I 7). Thus does he establish the central role of the sea in the investigative sailing and concrete geography of the *Genealogy*. It is worth quoting this passage at length:

> Even if I were to omit the Cyclades and other islands of the Aegean Sea, Achaea, Illyria, and Thrace, where to a large extent the kindling for this folly blazed forth, especially while the Greek state was flourishing, this contagion infected the shores of the Black Sea, the Hellespont, Maeonia, Icaria, Pamphylia, Cilicia, Phoenicia, and Syria as well as Egypt. [...] In the same way it infected all of Lybia, Syrtis, and the shore of Numidia as well as the Atlantic bays of the Western sea and the most distant gardens of the Hesperides. Nor it was contained only by the shores of the Mediterranean Sea; it penetrated even to peoples unfamiliar with the sea. Falling victim to this ruin along with the costal inhabitants were those who dwelled along the Nile of unknown source, and the plague-ridden Libyan sands, and the far reaches of most ancient Thebes, and also upper Egypt, and the scorching Garamantes and hot-blooded, shaggy Ethiopians as well as the scented Arabs, rich Persians, people of the Ganges, and Indians distinguished by their dark skin, and Babylonians, and the high peaks of the Caucasus, with its rugged cliffs facing both the hot sun and icy valleys, the Caspian Sea, the savage Hyrcanians, the entire Tanais, the ever-snowy Rhodope, and also the uncivilized Scythian barbarians. And after it had infected even the waves of the Eastern ocean and the islands of the Red Sea, finally it reached us in Italy, until even Rome, mistress of the worlds, was clouded in its murky fog. (I Preface, I 5–8)

[29] Note that the *Mare magnum* (or *Mare Maius)* in Boccaccio's *De montibus*, 82 is, instead, how the Euxine Sea (*Pontus*, in *De maribus* 92), or Black Sea, was called; see more in Pastore-Stocchi, *De montibus*, 2119, n.132.

The poet-captain of the *Genealogy* sails twice, he claims, to the Aegean Sea, visiting the islands that make this sea the most relevant portion of the Mediterranean, accounting perhaps also for its Greek name (*Archi* = chief and *pelagos* = sea).[30] From the Elsa and Arno Rivers the voyager goes to the Tyrrhenian sea, whence he reaches the Aegean and the coasts of Egypt, Syria, and Cyprus (Books II–IV), all the way up to the Attic shores and Athens (Book V). Then he sails back through the Western Mediterranean to Rome and the Etruscan shores, and with the help of God to the "insueta maria" (VII Preface, 2), the unfamiliar waters of the Ocean through the Sea of the Lion and the Strait of Gibraltar. From here the seafarer sails back to the Aegean, arriving at the island of Samos (Book IX). The journey has a stop at Crete (Book XI), and after enjoying a celebration of the Mediterranean and the progeny of Neptune (Book X), he is back in the waters of the Western Mediterranean, stopping at the sites of Miseno, Ischia, Cuma, the Eolian Islands, and Sicily (Books XII–XIII).

In Books XIV and XV, dedicated to a systematic defense of poetry, the exhausted poet-captain ("fatigatum nautam," XV Preface, 2) defends himself and his sailing from potential attacks and does so through nautical metaphors. He explains the mission he has put forward with his sea-journey and the endurance he has shown throughout. Book XV concludes the *Genealogy* by reflecting on the crossing of the "sea" of the previous thirteen books and delivers the precious image of the poet-captain who protected his little bark/poetry throughout the entire journey:

> Fundavi, serenissime rex, quibus potui armamentis hinc inde naviculam, ne estu procellosi maris aut ventorum adverso impetu pelleretur in litus, et illisa ruptis compagibus solveretur. Et, ne, crepitantibus desuper nubibus, in ymbrem solutis infestum, aut coruscum fulminantibus ignem dilueretur aut verteretur in cinerem, tegumenta superaddidi, que oportuna ratus sum. Nec non et proresiis atque rudentibus illam illigavi scopulis, ne ab undis se retrahentibus una cum illis traheretur in pelagus.
>
> [I have now steadied and trimmed my little craft, O most clement King, by such means as I could, for fear she be driven ashore by the wash of a stormy sea or the counterforce of the wind, with joints sprung and timbers crushed. And I have spread above her such protection as seemed opportune against lowering clouds that dissolve in rain or deadly flashes of lightning, lest she be either swamped or burned. Finally, I have made her fast to the rocks, with stays and hawsers, that the ebb tide might not drag her into the depths.] (XV Preface, 1)

Boccaccio was definitely not the first to organize a defense of poetry built around a genealogy of pagan gods and their descendants. Before him Paolino Veneto, a Franciscan historian, had written *Diis gentium et fabulis poetarum* [*On the pagan gods and the fables of the poets*], a mythological treatise included in his *Chronologia magna*,[31] dedicated to the genealogy of the gods and defending classical poetry at the same time. Boccaccio no doubt was familiar with Paolino's treatise, since he wrote offensive epithets about the Venetian, such as "idiot,"

[30] Giorgio Ieranò, *Arcipelago. Isole e miti del Mar Egeo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), 4.

[31] See more in Morosini, "Le favole dei poeti e il buon governo per Paolino Veneto: il trattato in volgare veneziano *De regimine rectoris* e il *Diis gentium et fabulis poetarum*," in *Paolino Veneto. Storico, narratore e geografo*, eds. Roberta Morosini and Marcello Ciccuto (Rome: Venetia/Venezia for L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2019).

"labyrinthic," and "confused"[32] in the margins of the manuscript Lat. 4939 of the *Chronologia* now kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Paolino himself follows Ysidore's *Diis gentium* (*Etym.* VIII 11) in organizing the Roman-Greek history of the pagan gods around a chronological axis, a "secundum ordinem temporum." However, Boccaccio remains the first to locate the genealogy of the pagan gods and the defense of the veracity of ancient poetry in space rather than time, presuming to sail to the regions where mythical events unfolded, describing them and recalling local myths.

Geography in Boccaccio's *Genealogy* is not a mere list of places that offer an occasion to evoke a myth, as it was in Diodorus Siculo's *Bibliotheca historica* (*The Library of History*, 60–30 BC). Rather, it contributes to a mythographical study. It does so in two ways. One, it shows how widespread the culture of the myths is, and two, it reveals that the places our author/sailor visits are the same as those of the myths told in ancient times. The stages for these myths still exist, offering testimony that something in those myths had historical value, producing a toponymy whose eponyms of a city, a river, and a sea are derived from them, and not the contrary. Said otherwise, the places reached by the boat of the poet-sailor of the *Genealogy* are not mythopoetic spaces. They do not produce the myths, but often take their name from the mythical event that took place in those spaces, sometimes even determining a craft. For example, "locating" the creativity of the Cyclops on the island of Lipari provides evidence of Boccaccio's sensitivity to an empirical approach to the location of myths. "It is said that their ironwork operations are near Lipari to point out that craftsmen have to select places suitable for their craft. I ask, what would an iron workman do in a swamp? What about a fisherman on a mountain top? What about a farmer on a rock? What about a doctor in the desert? Nothing indeed, and so Virgil describes the workshop of the workmen in Lipari because it is a fiery place where workmen soften metals" (X XVI, 4).

Although myths tell of places and actions that unfolded in those places, Boccaccio is not ready to accept myths with fanciful interpretations, even when presented by wise and illustrious ancestors. For example, he rejects Pliny's views of the nymphs in the *Naturalis historia*: "Although it is completely possible to believe a famous and erudite man, it is not so also for senseless and foolish women and ignorant peasants who assert, without blushing, that they have seen very beautiful women, whom they themselves call witches, issuing forth from springs" (VII XIV, 11). This is often the case when the genesis of a certain place is in question, as when Boccaccio, who has grown annoyed with discussing all the possible etymologies for Neptune, concludes by saying that he finds it "ridiculous to want to derive the qualities of a kingdom from the mystical name of its king" ["Ridiculum est ab inopinato regis nomine velle regni qualitates exprimere"] (X I, 11). To understand Boccaccio's criteria for truth in myth, it is worth considering the case concerning the wanderings of Io/Isis (*Geneal*. IV XLVI) who, after her metamorphosis into a cow, would—according to Aeschylus (*Prometheus* v.705 ff. and v.788 ff.)—cross the sea and so determine the names of the Ionian sea and the Bosphorus ("the passage of the cow"). In the *Genealogy* as in the *De mulieribus* (VIII) Boccaccio deliberately ignores both fables related to Io's crossing the sea as a cow and the naming of both seas, to focus instead on the confidence she had in her own ability ("sue confisa solertie," *Geneal.* IV XLVI, 3) and her civilizing industriousness. He concludes, "in this story there are so many contradictory aspects of both the events and time periods that not only does it eliminate any credibility in the story but it makes it utterly impossible to find any semblance to the truth. The insertion of Jupiter especially is an obstacle: making him contemporary with Apis makes us disbelieve this story almost

[32] See *Chronologia magna*, ms. Lat. 4939, fols. 171, ff. 180 e 187v. More in Morosini-Ciccuto, *Paolino Veneto*.

entirely. But the search for the truth here can be left to experts" (*Geneal.* IV XLVI, 5). This can be taken as an indication of the parameters Boccaccio adopts to assess the truth of a myth. Too many incongruences of the events and time periods deprive the story of Io/Isis of any verisimilitude.[33] There are also times when Boccaccio admits that he does not know whether the presence of man gave birth to the site or the contrary, as happened with Miseno in the bay of Naples, an area Boccaccio knew very well (XIII XXIII, 3).

Boccaccio, who had already written his treatise on mountains, rivers, seas, and lakes, even suggests that his readers consult his *De fluminibus*, where the recalling of rivers and seas accompanies the stories of the myths from which often their names derived.[34] Such is the case with the Hellespont, the present-day Dardanelles (*De maribus* 35), and the *Scylleum mare* (*De maribus* 105). The first is the eponym of the Boetian princess Helle, who along with her twin brother Phrixus was hated by her stepmother Ino, who tried to kill them both. They were rescued by a flying golden ram sent by Nephele, their natural mother (Ysidore, *Etym*. 13, 16, 8), but Helle fell off the ram into the Hellespont (which was therefore named after her) and died. As for Scylla, Boccaccio returns to this myth at least twice (*Geneal*. IV XIV and X IX) with the intention of freeing it from its most fanciful aspects, explaining the perils of the strait of Messina in scientific and meteorological terms. He gives his reasons for this in his discussion of the Ovidian myth of Fetonte, who fell into the Po River. "Fictio," he writes, "hec iudicio meo sub spisso cortice hystoriam et naturalem rationem tegit" ["In my judgment, fiction hides a historical and natural explanation under a thick covering"] (VII XLI, 3). Despite its fictive trappings, this fable deals with a natural story and a natural reason. It is no wonder then, that, of all the poetic sources describing the origin of the Po River, Boccaccio chose to trust Hyginus' *Astronomica*, a scientific text that he considers the most reliable account (see also *De fluminibus* V 380).

Boccaccio's approach to what he calls "decepta vetustas" ["deluded antiquity"] (X I, 7) and fanciful writings leads him to embrace and retain only rational explanations of the myths, rejecting all that is not plausible, as he did in the *Filocolo* where he tried to amend the "fanciful chatter of the ignorant" (I I, 26).[35] We need to believe him when he says about the Cretan Jove's undeserved reputation of being a god, "Nos autem veteres in sua fatuitate sinamus, et ad omissa vertamus calamum" ["But we should leave the ancients to their foolishness and turn our pens to arguments overlooked"] (*Geneal.* XI I, 14). Poetry carries the same truth as philosophy, but in order to be believed, needs to be persuasive, written and composed "as if it were true," otherwise it has to be considered a "tale of delirious old women" (XIV, IX, 8). This statement, despite its gendered slur, has to be taken in the context of a poetics that insists on "a cognitive dimension to the creative process," as Filippo Andrei justly writes,[36] where the poet combines the creativity of poetry with the truth of philosophy.[37] Trying to show that "it is useful rather than damnable to compose stories," (XIV IX 1), Boccaccio claims that poets risk becoming "fabulones," tale-

[33] This is further evidenced in *De montibus* where, in the section dedicated to the different names of the seas, for the Ionian Boccaccio attributes the name of this sea to the king Yonio (following Ysidore's *Etym,* 13, 16, 7) and for the Bosphorus he deliberately leaves out Io/Isis (*De maris*, 18 and 58–59), unlike in other instances in the treatise where geographical eponyms preserve traces of past mythological presences.

[34] About the rivers Tiber (VII L) and Nilus (VII XXX 2), Boccaccio refers the readers to read and learn more in his treatise of geography *De montibus et fluminibus*.

[35] On unity of knowledge through poetry see Morosini, "Boccaccio the Poet-Philosopher" and Morosini, *Per difetto rintegrare.*

[36] Filippo Andrei, *Boccaccio Philosopher: An Epistemology of the Decameron* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 64.

[37] Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 118, and Morosini, "Boccaccio the Poet-Philosopher," 296.

mongers, "or to use the lower and more hateful term which they sometimes employ in their resentment—liars," (XIV IX, 1), when they compose fables that are not plausible in content and form. Poetry, in fact, "which ignorant triflers cast aside, is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented" ("The definition of poetry, its origin and its function," XIV VII, 1–2; Osgood, 39).

Poetry and Geography: Recollecting Relics of the Past

When Boccaccio defends poetry by sailing through the sites of myths, he turns geography into a concrete cartography of poetry where one can locate myths in actual space. The map shows that the itinerary of the maritime traveler is also an *itinere ad unum*, since by travelling to the sites of myths, and recording in writing what he has seen and remembers, the writer "collects relics of the ancient wreck" and brings them into a kind of whole (cf. XIV Preface, 3); "et undique, clementissime rex, iuxta promissum, veteris naufragii, prout concessum est, desuper fragmenta collegimus, et in unum corpus, qualecunque sit, pro viribus ingenii nostri redegimus" ["from every side, O merciful King, I have according to my promise collected such fragments of the ancient wreck as God willed, and wrought them into a kind of a whole, as best as I could"] (XIV Preface, 1; Osgood, 141). With his poetry he intends to bring those relics together. In fact, in the prefaces of the books of the *Genealogy*, each place he sails to bears witness to what remains of the "shipwrecked" past. The task of the poet-sailor is to collect and bring those fragments into a whole, as he tells king Hugo:

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

Moreover, in the opening chapter of Book XIV which is dedicated to the defense of poetry, Boccaccio resumes his journey and recalls all the places he has seen through his navigation—from hell to the ocean, to all the islands under the sky, and to the Mediterranean in the "Neptuni ceruleas edes" ["the sea-green palaces of Neptune"] (XIV Preface, 2). The preface to this book is particularly revealing since it comes back to the theme of sailing to rescue the remains of shipwreck (as in Book I). Addressing the king, the author reiterates the outcome of his sea-voyage (XIV Preface, 3) as that of "recollecting" the *membra disiecta* of the shipwrecked volumes of ancient authors.[38] Poetry—as we mentioned above—is the art of *recolligere,* organizing and unifying the various scattered parts of knowledge as is further stated in the

[38] Chines, "Petrarca, Boccaccio e le favole antiche," 197–206.

Genealogy when, having to deliberate on the less fanciful and fictitious interpretation given by various poets about why Lycurgus, a descendant of Jove, lost his sight, the author writes that, "such a multitude of diverse things can be brought together in a whole" ["Que tam diversa sic in unum revocari possunt"] (XI XXII, 2). Boccaccio also professes this mission of bringing scattered things into a unity in Book I, assigning himself the role of Asclepius, the Roman god of medicine:

> Satis advertere possum quid michi faciendum sit, qui inter confragosa vetustatis aspreta et aculeos odiorum, membratim discerptum, attritum et in cineres fere redactum ingens olim corpus deorum procerumque gentilium nunc hunc nunc illuc collecturus et, quasi Esculapius alter, ad instar Ypoliti consolidaturus sum.
>
> [I can understand what I must do, as I venture over the rough terrain of antiquity and among the stringers of hatred, in order to collect from here and there the huge corpus of gods and noble princes, torn limb from limb, beaten, and reduced nearly to ashes, and to consolidate this corpus as if it were Hippolytus and I another Asclepius.] (I Preface, 50)

As Boccaccio learned from Seneca (*Phaedra* 1085), Asclepius is the one who returns unity to the dismembered and dilacerated body of Hippolytus, the son of Theseus and Hippolyta, who fell victim to his stepmother Phaedra for not accepting her sexual advances. Once brought back to life by the doctor, Hippolytus left his home in Attica and went to Rome where he founded the city of Ariccia, named after his wife (X L, 2). As "another Asclepius," who now sails through the sea of the ancient writings, the author of the *Genealogy* as recomposes dismembered knowledge and brings back to life from death and oblivion places like Ariccia where useful inventions were developed.

This art of collecting and giving unity to scattered fragments is what both poetry and geography are about. According to classical geographers familiar to Boccaccio, "geography has the task to present the known world as one and continuous, to describe its nature and position, and to include only those things that would be contained in one comprehensive and general description."[39] Even in Book XIV of the *Genealogy*, dedicated, again, to the objective and function of poetry, Boccaccio advises that in addition to knowing at least the principles of the other Liberal Arts, one should have "in one's memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains" (XIV Preface, 3; Osgood, 40). Transmission of the knowledge of the past goes along with geographical awareness. In his treatise he explains very clearly that he conceived it to benefit both students of poetry and history, in order to help them understand the geographical allusions made by the ancient writers: "Whom I will imitate as though it were some well-known type of praiseworthy exercise, lest leisure time should altogether escape me. Starting from a labor of love, if I am capable, I wanted to create a lighter work to help students work through the books of famous poets and the histories of the ancients" (*De montibus* 1). Geography and poetry share the same narrative function in the *Genealogy*, corroborating truth thanks to a map of Mediterranean places that transmit and keep record of "quarumcunque gentium hystorie," the stories of all people from everywhere (*Geneal.* I Preface, 21). Poetry, for Boccaccio, seeks to give epistemological unity to "the scattered and fanciful chatter of the ignorant," and like geography, proves both to "inform,"

[39] Ptolemy, *Geographike Uphegesis*, quoted by Lukermann*, The Concept of Location*, 194.

in the Dantean sense of giving shape and unity, and to impart knowledge; geography does the same through cartography. Cartography and poetry are both arts of creating, *poiesis* (from the Ancient Greek *ποίησις*), both shaping and bringing something into being that did not exist before. The ultimate end of poetry and cartography is to record, to keep a long-lasting memory in the pages of books, of spaces where human history unfolded, organizing itself into communities, and invented ways to move civilization forward.

To fully understand the innovation brought by Boccaccio with his cartography of poetry, one may consider that sites on medieval maps were indicated with biblical and historical figures or legends, all synonymous with a site or location. On the "Catalan map," Marco Polo and his caravan represent China, and Alexander the Great stands for India. In the Middle Ages biblical, fantastical, and legendary elements define territories we now associate with real geography, privileging legends over specific localities, physical contours, and political borders. Boccaccio, on the contrary, refers to places with their real names within a concrete geographical dimension before evoking a story related to that site, and his maps offers itself as what Denis Wood would consider a place of spatial semiotics, where sites are read as a series of signs or "semantic clouds."[40] Considering Wood's discursive function of the map "as something to be read"[41] and what he calls the "rhetorical power of maps,"[42] it is time to explore the signifying function of Boccaccio's literary map in the *Genealogy* as a meaningful space where human history once unfolded.

The Mediterranean *Locus poetandi et operandi*:[43] A Place of Unity and Human Industry

A pivotal role in Boccaccio's attempt to map poetry is played by the Mediterranean Sea that he traverses in the *Genealogy*. Adopting one of Alan Corbellari's epistemological categories,[44] we could say that in the *Genealogy* the Mediterranean operates as a space of traversal and reunion, and secondly that this sea has brought enormous benefits to mankind since men invented the boat and started navigating. But what kind of narrative space is this Mediterranean and how does it support the double objective of poetry to be useful and give unity to that which has none?

We can start by investigating the sea as a space of crossing and reunion and noting how the poet-sailor seeks unity through an empirical method based on first-hand experience, personally observing the sites of the myths, assessing what remains of the mythical past, and providing an eye-witness of their truth. In fact, the experience of the places he visits is now encompassed by the verb *to look*, because knowledge passes through the eyes. See how for examples in Book V in Athens and even more we sailor arrives at the entrance of the river Tiber, the sight becomes a moving observation small boat slows down to access the "began to look all its surroundings" with attention. He makes sure to measure in distance what he sees from where he is: the ruins of Laurentium and Lavinium and the homeland of the ancient Latins; farther off he sees Alba Longa and a little further on, Rome and "while *he stares at her* intently," her ancient kings came

[40] David Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 55. See also by the same author *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992).
[41] Cf. also José Luis Romanillos, "Rethinking the Power of Maps by Denis Wood," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*," 18 January (2013): 123–126, 124.
[42] Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 4.
[43] See also Morosini, "Il mare e la navigazione."
[44] Alain Corbellari, "La mer, espace structurant du roman courtois," *Mondes marins du Moyen Âge*. Actes du 30 Colloque du CUERMA (3 et 5 Mars 2005), *Senefiance*, 52 (Aix en Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2006),105–113.

to mind and her illustrious triumphs. By staring at Rome, he remembers one of the most ancient forefathers of this "victorious nation," the Etruscan Dardanus and measuring memory in space, he says that he sees from afar the Dardanelles. From this, just like as the eyewitness builds through sight a topography of memory, he traveled to the Maeonian or Etruscan shore, in order to see 'with his own eyes' the monuments of the ancestors, leaving behind him the mouth of the Tuscan river and following the ancient course of the water.

As announced in the first Book of the *Genealogy*, seeing is the relevant part of Boccaccio's empirical approach to his inquiry into the genealogy of the gods and its posterity: the seafarer's task is, once he reaches a site, "to see" in order to bring forward the recollection of the relicts from a shipwrecked past occurs through the eyes: *Videre* (to see), *intelligere* (to understand), *servare* (to keep), *exarare et in opus collecta deducere* ["to set it all down in writing and organize the work"] (I Preface, 14–15). Memory will store what he sees and the pen will record it in writing. The art of recollecting what he has seen into one work will ensure the everlasting memory of the past.

Here is the innovation brought by Boccaccio: the emphasis on the sight makes the sea-journey in the *Genealogy* an experience rather then a merely verbal maritime travel such as Petrarch's *Itinerarium* (1356–1357) where he evokes the places, but does not physically go there.[45] The narrator of the *Genealogy*, instead, uses his pen to give a plausible account of his sailing as if it were true, suggesting that it should be believed because he is an eye-witness of the places where he headed with the ship, places that still exist, thus suggesting that his sailing, and his poetry, is as plausible as the poetry of the ancients that he is trying to defend.

In this sense, the narrator of the *Genealogy* is more similar to Dante the pilgrim-sailor of the *Commedia*, than to Petrarch. Dante, in fact, from the first lines of his poem associates himself with a captain of a ship that almost shipwrecked and who ended his "sailing" successfully in the Ocean, where "his" Odysseus failed. Dante and Boccaccio share more similarities in terms of their ability to survive the crossing of the Ocean in relationship to Odysseus: In both the *Commedia* and the *Genealogy* the "salty deep" (*Par*. II 13) that is crossed by the poet-sailors is the same incredibly vast, unknown, and dangerous sea that leads to total knowledge (see *Genesis* 3, 5), the very subject of the poem. Shipwreck is a possible event for both sailors, but the two poets differently from Dante's Odysseus are able to enter the Ocean with the help of God's wisdom, which is an indirect way of reminding readers how special is the sea-voyage so central in the *fabula* of their texts, the *Commedia* and the *Genealogy*.[46]

Still, it should be noted a difference between the two navigations in the Ocean: Giovanni is able to access the Ocean with the same "piccioletta barca" (Dante, *Par*. II 1) which Dante claims in *Paradise* II won't ever make it in the waters of the "pelago" (Ocean, v. 5) without being "smarriti" (v. 5) like "his" Odysseus. In *Paradise* II Dante sails on a big boat and assigns the "little bark" to the unequipped sailors, those readers who are not ready to sail in the Ocean, because they are ignorant of philosophy and theology. Dante's boat is a special one since it must cross the sea of wisdom, and he risks leaving behind him those readers who navigate in a lesser boat (v. 6):

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[45] Ronald Martinez, "'Scienze delle cittade': Rhetoric and Politics on the Sixth Day of the Decameron," *Medievalia* 34 (2013): 57–86. Cf. also Theodore J. Cachey Jr., *Petrarch's Guide to the Holy Land: Itinerarium ad sepulchrum domini nostri Yehsu Christi* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 158–159.

[46] Teodolinda Barolini rightly points out that the character of Ulysses dramatizes the fundamental *trope* of the *Commedia*: the voyage (see Barolini, Teodolinda. "Inferno 26: The Quest," *Commento Baroliniano, Digital Dante* (New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2018), https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-26/) (accessed on February 9, 2019).

O you, eager to hear more,
who have followed in your little bark,
my ship that singing makes its way,

turn back if you would see your shores again.
Do not set forth upon the deep,
for, losing sight of me, you would be lost. (*Par.* II, 1–6)

Boccaccio, differently from Dante, believes that poetry should be accessible to everyone and not only to the wise and learned (*Geneal*. V XII, 5). He reiterates this idea in defense of poetical fictions not only in the *Genealogy*, but also as the commentator of the *Commedia* (*Esposizioni* I, *esp. litt*. 78 and I *esp. all*. 4–15), although in sonnet CXXV "Io ho messo in galea senza biscotto," Boccaccio will return to the image of Dante's "little skiff." In order to defend himself from those who accused him of having vilified Dante's poetry by revealing the mysteries to the masses of the poetically uninitiated with his public lectures of the poem, Boccaccio surprisingly uses the nautical image of the "piccioletta barca" of *Par.* II 1–6. Referring to the act of writing as sailing, he portrays himself as amused while looking at the "vulgar crowd" drowning in the sea that is the *Commedia*, because they are ignorant who believe themselves learned and smart but are not equipped with a "boat" that can lead them into the deep senses of the poem.

It is now time to explore how the Mediterranean supports the goal of poetry to be useful, again through geography and literary mapping. Every shore and site reached by the poet's boat is a pretext for accounting for the beginning and flourishing of civilization, when men, with their laboriousness and industry, invented professions, started navigating the sea, established commerce, built cities, worked the land, and developed machinery. The space the narrator as seafarer needs to cross to reach the sites where mythical inventions took place is a mirror of human industry and ingenuity in its own right.

Boccaccio opens Book X describing the benefits of this sea to mankind in a beautiful page that praises the invention of the boat and the effects of navigation in the Mediterranean:

> The most ancient men believed that the Mediterranean Sea, bounded by the African, Asian and European shores, notable for a thousand islands, was brought down to our lands from the Ocean, O illustrious king, by the labor of Hercules between Abila and Calpe, Western promontories, which Pomponius calls the pillars of Hercules. From this, with God in his liberality so providing us with benefits, a great boon was obtained for mortals. What is to see, with divine light showing the way, boats, conceived by human genius and fabricated by artifice, now furrowing the waves with oarage, now with a stretched sail driven by the force of the winds, on which every great cargo is carried? What is to think of the daring of those who first entrusted themselves to unknown waves and untried breezes? It makes one tremble. But such, although not always, was for the most part the faith or the fortune of these daring men as they ferried in a long journey—I will say carried not only along a course but in swift flight—gold and other metals to the inhabitants of the East, purple garments and spices, precious stones and ivory to the inhabitants of the West, exotic birds and balsam, woods unknown in our forests, gums and other saps of trees, and roots not familiar to every land,

> from which they seek medications and innumerable delights as much for sound as for sick bodies. Furthermore, what is not the least benefit for the whole of the human race, as an effect of these navigations of this sea, it has come to pass that the Cimber and the Celt from the opposite corners of the world sometimes know who the Arabs are, what the Red Sea is, and what saps the woods of Sheba exude; the Hyrcanian and the inhabitants of Tanais know the Atlantic Hesperides and even taste their golden apples; the cold Hyperborean and Sarmatian tread seething Ethiopia, the Nile, and pestilential Libya; so also the Spaniard and Moor are visited and visit Persians, Indians, and the Caucasus; and the northern islander from Thule treads the far shores of Ceylon. While they exchange their goods with each other, it happens that they marvel at not only their customs, laws, and traits, but nay, while one looks at another as if he is from another world and thinks that he is not circled by one and the same ocean, he mixes practices, shares trust through the exchange of merchandise, and joins in friendships. While they teach their own languages they also become acquainted with foreign ones. And so it happens that those whom geographical distance had made strangers to one another are joined by navigation and made harmonious. In addition there are also many other things which, if they are not so conspicuous to the observer, are perhaps more precious because of their continuous utility. The sea offers infinite benefits to the sailing boats of fishermen from which it happens that the sumptuous tables of the rich are adorned with great and delicious fish and the poor are nourished by smaller ones. In addition, when it offers calm, herds from fertile lands, beasts of burden, grains, and whatever is beneficial for food are carried from one mainland to another. It provides baths to the strong and infirm, and it makes the tasteless strong with its salt; it moistens the adjacent lands everywhere, it fills channels with subterranean movement, from which we have springs and rivers, which unless the sea were not present to receive them, would wither in their channels with the worst plague among men. (X Preface, 1)

The only book that does not open with the aquatic metaphor of the poet's vessel, this one celebrates the sea as a privileged space narrating the efforts that the ancients put forth in organizing themselves into civic communities, acquiring for the first time awareness of oneself and of the "other," and of other spaces and races. "Horror equidem est" (X Preface, 15) writes Boccaccio: "it makes one tremble" to think of all the benefits derived from the invention of the boat and the advantages of navigation such as it reduced the geographical distance that had made strangers to one another, fostered the exchange of goods and of medical remedies, brought "the marvel," at the other's customs and laws, an awareness of "another" world different from their own, and another language, taught to mix practices, share trust through the exchange of merchandise, and join in friendships. Celebrating Neptune, Boccaccio exemplifies through his descendants, the Cyclops, the craftsmanship binding human creativity and laboriousness to the maritime world:

> I think it is because nearly all models of things that are crafted seem to be taken from the sea or from water. They say that it was from fish that we understood how battle lines should be arranged. From fish again, by examining their scales, we derived how to protect men and horses with iron. From the back bone of a fish

> stripped of its flesh and found on the shore we derived the understanding of how to construct long ships. From the beaver the artifice of building a home and terrace was demonstrated. From the turtle, once its meats were consumed, the composition of a cithara was revealed, and also the pattern for roofs. From mussels and oysters we took the bending of doors and hinges as well as how we can ascend lofty towers by means of curved stairs. Also, how to make bugles. In addition, it is in water that the plaiting of grasses and the spinning of threads arose, and that we were shown to intertwine threads and to weave fabric. Waters first displayed to us how to vary the color of fabric with the blood of fish. And it is known that the movement of waters first offered music, rhythm and tune to those contemplating them. Why do I give many examples? Innumerable are the products of the sea that instruct the genius of craftsmen, from which it happens that we justifiably name craftsmen the sons of Neptune and call them Cyclops. (X XVI 3–4)

Many indeed are the inventions of the ancients, as Paolino Veneto himself had noted, yet Boccaccio emphasizes those that convey efforts to bring mankind out of wildness and savagery.

One example is Iarba, remembered for moving his people, the Getuli, from the fiery sands and extreme solitude of Ethiopia and instructing them "about many things which pertain to living humanely" ["in multis ad humanitatem pertinentibus instruxit"] (XI XI, 1). With his institutions he mitigated their ferocious habits "because through excellent institutions he tamed their savage ways" (XI XI, 4). Boccaccio always saw dangerous consequences of isolation and stigmatized them in the *Decameron* in the character of Rustico, whose name was meant to convey the wildness of those cast away from humanity and who merely retain the appearance of humans (*Decameron* III.10). He theorizes this systematically in *Genealogy* IV LXVI in the figure of Lycaon, king of Arcadia, in a story extracting the consequences of the human consortium of avarice and theft. According to Leontius, Lycaon lived by ambushing travelers and robbing them in the forest, giving rise to the fable that he was turned into a wolf. Boccaccio stresses the cultural connotations of this fable, noting that when we are cast away from humanity, we immediately clothe ourselves as wolves and preserve only a human likeness (IV LXVI, 6).

The importance of living a civilized communal life is a leitmotiv throughout the *Genealogy*. At one point the building of cities accompanies the poet's celebration of the usefulness of music to the civic community. Boccaccio narrates that Amphion was such an expert in the art of music that, according to Lactantius, he received the cithara from Mercury himself and with that he built the walls of Thebes (see also Seneca, *Hercules furens*). Here the poet celebrates the civic power not only of music, but also of rhetoric, in the words of Brunetto Latini, "the sciences of the cities."[47]

With Mercury, the poet finds the occasion to consider the foundation of cities, of the arts and professions, the value of friendship for the wellbeing of civic life, and in particular, the creation of merchants whose protector is Mercury. In fact, in *Genealogy* II VII, 10, Mercury is a negotiator, *mercatorum kyrios*, the lord of merchants, as Hugh of St. Victor describes him, the God of trade, exchange, and profit of commerce (his Latin name probably derives from the term *merx* or *mercator*, meaning merchant). Boccaccio appreciates the role of merchants, as their mobility incentivizes production and the wellbeing of the cities. Considering their individualism

[47] See Martinez, "'Scienze delle cittade.'"

and greed, however, he cares more about negotiators of alliances, as revealed by his interpretation of the myth of the three Graces, Pasithea, Aglaea, and Euphrosyne (V XXXV, 7).

For many human inventions, Boccaccio turns to Vitruvius' *De Architectura* and in particular to his prescriptions for the planning and design of military camps, cities, and structures both large (aqueducts, buildings, baths, harbors) and small (machines, measuring devices, instruments).[48] The presence of Vitruvius in the *Genealogy* further confirms Boccaccio's empirical inclination towards myths. Well before the Renaissance, he finds in *De Architectura* a reliable resource that he trusts both to assess the veracity of an ancient poet (as in the case of Ovid's myth of Proteus [II XXX, 2]), and to reject an openly fantastic fable by the same Ovid like that of the famous spring Salmacis (III XXI, 6–7). Boccaccio also relies on Vitruvius' *De Architectura* for support in discussing the gathering of men into communities, their discovery of fire to warm themselves, and their leaving behind their caves eventually to give birth to language (XII LXX, 9).[49]

Through the genealogy of a series of creators whose inventions are transmitted by the ancient fables, supported not only by Vitruvius but also by other reliable scientific sources, Boccaccio shows that the ancients are not just storytellers ("Poetas non esse mendaces," XIV XIII, 3–5), but very learned men, endowed with intelligence and "artificio," or skill. Their books, as passionately stated in XIV XVII, are not "merely apes of the philosophers,"[50] but laborious as apes. They recall how humans moved out of wildness, and with their labor and industry started to organize themselves in communities, to build cities, to establish laws and institutions, to work the land and fish for their sustainability, to come up with inventions that were useful. Crossing the spaces of poetry thus establishes its ends by showing the *utilitas*, the good, that the fables have brought to civilization as they account for the inventions useful to humans and communal living: navigation, medicine, agriculture, construction, music, and poetry.[51]

Cartography of Poetry, Map of Civilization

The maritime imagery adopted by Boccaccio in the *Genealogy* proves central to the defense of poetry and an exposition of its double ends of usefulness and unification of other kinds of knowledge and material. Through the cartography of poetry that Boccaccio traces upon his little boat of poetry crossing the sea of the errors and the achievements of the ancients, the author recounts, on shore after shore, the inventions recorded by the poets in their fables that proved useful to civilization, making the map of myths also a map of culture, the record of sites where civilization commenced through the gestures of pagan gods and their progeny. Each mapped site indicates not only a geographic place, but a "productive space," in Henri Lefevre's terms,[52] a space that recounts human labor and creativity. The poet-cartographer maps myths as sites that narrate human history, relocating poetry where it belongs, in society. The idea of Boccaccio

[48] Boccaccio says that "all the sailors of the Mediterranean Sea preserve this description [by Vitruvius] as the best and accurate, and especially the Genovese, who certainly surpass others in their capacity for nautical skill" (IV XIV, 24).

[49] Boccaccio sometimes transcribes passages literally from Vitruvius. See *The Architecture of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio*, trans. Joseph Gwilt (London: Priestley and Weale, 1826).

[50] This is the title of *Genealogy* XIV XVII, where Boccaccio defends the labor and operosity of poets. See Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry*, 79.

[51] Cf. Paolo Cherchi, "Gli 'inventori delle cose' nelle *Genealogie* di Boccaccio," *Critica del testo* 16/3 (2013): 85–118.

[52] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of space* (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 1991), 39.

about the civilizing role of poetry, which, thanks to the cartographic approach authorized by the poet's sea-journey in the *Genealogy*, helps us trace the progress of humanity on a map which we can read as empirically true.

Poetry not only preserves and transmits the civil conquests of mankind. As Boccaccio claims also in *De mulieribus*, it "shows forth the sky, the earth, the seas, and all living things; there is nothing open to investigation that one cannot understand by careful study of its letters," (XXVII, 13–15). [53] This is the idea in Book XIV of the *Genealogy*, where, quoting from Cicero's *Pro Archia*, Boccaccio asserts the role of poetry in the world of humans as our travel companion, convenient in all places: "These studies may engage the strength of our manhood and divert us in old age; they are the adornment of prosperity, the refuge and solace of adversity; delightful at home, convenient in all places; they are ever with us through the night season; in our travels; in our rural retreats. And if we may not pursue them ourselves nor enjoy them in person, yet should we admire them as seen in others," (XIV XXII, 11; Osgood, 97).

Finally, we need to draw some conclusions in geocritical terms about what the mapmaking of the *Genealogy* reveals concerning poetics in Boccaccio's own life.[54] Just as Boccaccio creates his cartography of mythical sites in order to prove that they are true, he also maps the places of his own topography of memory. If the Arno is the space to celebrate Petrarch (*De fluminibus* 3), as well as the source of the Sorgia (*De fluminibus* 114), the Elsa River will always be Boccaccio's space. Boccaccio locates himself within his own cartography of poetry through that river. It returns in the crucial Book VII, exactly where Boccaccio—like Dante in the *Commedia*—succeeds in crossing the ocean in analogy or opposition to "il varco / folle d'Ulisse" (the mad leap of Odysseus [*Par.* XXVII 82–83]; see also *De fluminibus* 368). The poet-sailors of the *Commedia* and the *Genealogy* head on their small bark of poetry towards unfamiliar waters, entrusting, in Boccaccio's case, his goal of defending poetry and poets to that "arte nautica" which is "the skill of sailing":

> Nunc autem superset ut iniecta in fatigatum nautam tela excutiam ac, si possim, qualitercunque amoveam. Quis enim dubitet quin petatur a multis? Sane uti forte minus equo animo visus sum quandoque tulisse que in poesim et poetas immissa fuere, sic summa cum patientia, que in nautam evolaverint, quocunque nisi missa, perferam. Nec huius patientie ratio longe abest. Indigne quippe meo iudicio pulchra poesis et elegantes hac in facultate viri lacessiti fuere, nescio utrum superborum an ignorantium potius maledictis dixerim. Nauta autem non sic. Nam si pro viribus conatus sit arte nautica per maris vertiginosos anfractus et confragosa scopulis freta cymbam in tutum deducere, ne iuste regdargui possit, scio tamen quia multarum rerum ignarus sit, et ideo ex multis eo minus advertente commissis forsan merito redargui potest. (XV Preface, 2–3)
>
> [It now remains to offer some protection to the exhausted sailor from the weapons of his enemies, and in some way save him, if I can. No doubt he is pursued of many. But though aforetime I may have seemed impatient of the false charges against poetry and poets, yet shall I endure with the utmost patience the attacks

[53] Giovanni Boccaccio, [*De mulieribus Claris*] *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, Massachusetts: I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2001).
[54] Cf. also Michel Papio, "Geospatial Visualizations for the Study of Boccaccio," *Humanist Studies and Digital Age*, 5/1 (2017): 24–44, a study mainly dedicated to the treatise *On Mountains*.

> upon the sailor, however violent. Such a course is perfectly reasonable; for in my opinion, the vituperative attack upon fair poetry and the skillful practicers of that art was unworthy, proceeding as it did from either pride or ignorance, I am not sure which. Not so with the sailor. For if he has put forth his utmost strength and nautical skill to bring his craft past roaring whirlpools and rocky shoals to safety, one can find no just fault with him. But I am fully aware of his great ignorance, and happily deserves reproof for many errors of inadvertence.] (Osgood, 102)

Through his maritime and nautical imagery Boccaccio endows poetry and artistic invention with a stability that gives unity to the mobility and uncertainty of the world, a world which is in this sense like a sea, and which spatially joins his modernity[55] to the ancient culture from which he is temporally separated. He anchors his boat against the winds and the waves in the manner of a writer who has found something new: "Lignum preterea in litore ancoris et proresiis ingeniose firmavi, magis semper de bonitate divina confidens quam de robore vinculorum" ["I have fastened my little craft to the shore with anchors and cables of my own invention, yet ever trusting more in God's favor than in the strength of my own contrivances"] (XV Conclusion, 1, Osgood, 141). In the aquatic perspective of this metaphor, the Mediterranean Sea emerges as a structural place of conjunction and reunion, where the bark of poetry gives unity to the "veterum vestigia rerum" ["the vestiges of ancient things"] (XII I, 2). With sadness and nostalgia, like Lord Byron centuries later, Boccaccio beholds on his sea-journey the broken capitals, the destroyed columns, and empty temples of the past. He travels to gather and reunite the fragments of ancient shipwrecks. Through the nautical imagery of sailing Boccaccio rescues from oblivion the remaining relicts of the shipwrecked past:

> Clementissime rex, iuxta promissum veteris naufragii, prout concessum est, desuper fragmenta collegimus, et in unum corpus, qualecunque sit, pro viribus ingenii nostri redegimus. […] Quibus sic peractis, quasi in quesitam a principio stationem seu sinum venerimus, suadebat quietis desiderium, ut in litus ex navigio prosilirem, et, sacro gratiarum deo exibitori rite peracto, laborum victrici cimbe lauros apponere, et inde in exoptatum ocium ire. (XIV Preface, 3–4)
>
> [On all hands, O merciful King, I have according to my promise collected such fragments of the ancient wreck as God willed, and wrought them into a kind of whole, as best as I could. […] Now, that all is done, and I have, as it were reached the home or haven which I sought from the beginning, the desire of rest has been growing stronger within me, urging me to leap ashore from the bow, offer due to thanks to God for his gift of a safe return, fix the laurel on my triumphant little boat, and at last depart to my long-sought leisure.] (Osgood, 14–15)

By placing the laurel crown upon "his" victorious boat, he confirms that the "frail skiff" is Giovanni's "indagatione," namely this study that accomplishes triumphantly in the *Genealogy* its mission to give unity to what is scattered. If poetry as defined by Aristotle and reiterated in *Genealogy* XIV need not necessarily be a work in verses, and if the duty of the poet is to invent stories by referring to precise criteria of plausibility, then by sailing to the places of myths the

[55] Another reading of the modernity of the *Genealogy* can be found in David Lummus, "Boccaccio's Hellenism and the Foundations of Modernity," *Medievalia* 33 (2012): 101–167.

poet Boccaccio provides a plausible account of the genealogy of the gods and their progeny, and their useful inventions for mankind. Geography proves to be the theater for this poetry and history, gathering together stories and mapping out the spaces where these stories unfold and making them last forever. Through a rehabilitation of the truth of myths, Boccaccio's cartography in the *Genealogy* celebrates the power of *humanae litterae*, the power of poetry that eternalizes the deeds and civic conquests of mankind, and the power of geography which gives poetry a philosophical human *where*.