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**BOCCACCIO AND THE MEDITERRANEAN LEGEND
ABOUT VIRGIL THE MAGICIAN AND
THE CASTLE OF THE EGG IN NAPLES WITH A NOTE
ON MS STROZZI 152, FILOCOLO IV 31 AND
DECAMERON X 5.**

“Bien savez que Virgiles fist grant merveille, quant il assist deus chastiaus seur deus oés en mer” (“You know that Virgil did/ a great wonder, when he built two castles on two eggs in the sea”), says Adenet Le Roi, referring to the magic foundation of Naples. Adenet was a minstrel who traveled throughout Italy and visited Sicily and Naples, while following the Flemish knight Guido di Dampierre to the crusade in 1270. Coming across this passage in his *Cleomadés*, I started wondering about the legend of the so-called Castle of the Egg, still visible in the bay of Naples. According to legend, the castle was built on an egg by Virgil, who spent “diu et suavissime” (“a long and very pleasant interlude”) in the city of Naples, according to *Vergilii Vita Donatiana* (28), and was buried between the cities of Pozzuoli and Posillipo in his chosen place: at the opening of the cave of Posillipo, which the legend also says he created in one night. With the help of two thousand demons, he excavated the hill tracing the course of the stars, connecting Naples to Pozzuoli to make the lives of those traveling between them easier.

The *Cleomadés*, a fourteenth-century Old French novel, recounts the magic origin of Naples, a city founded on two castles by the sea, and includes a long passage on the Neapolitan Castle and the legends circulating in Naples about Virgil as a magician and healer:

Bien savez que Virgiles fist/ grant merveille,/ quant il assist deus chastiaus/ seur deus oés en mer/ et si les sot si compasser/ que qui l'un des oés briseroit/ tantost li chastiaus fonderoit/ ou ens en ovoit l'uef brisié./ Encor dist on que essaié/ fu d'un des chastiaus, et fondi, / a Naples le dist on ainsi;/ encor est la l'autres chastiaus, qui en mer siet et bons et biaux,/ s'i est li oés, c'est veritas/ seur quoi li chastiaus est fondés (“You know that Virgil did/ a great wonder, when he built two castles on two eggs in the sea/ and he hid them so well/ that if one of them broke/ the castle would collapse into the sea/ People say also that one of the two broke, and disintegrated into the sea/ at least that is what is said in Naples;/ the other castle is still there,/ beautiful and

strong on the sea, / if we can still see it, that means it is all true, / what are the foundations of the castle" [vv. 1649-62)]¹.

The editor of the *Cleomadés*, Albert Henry, believes that Adenet did not stay long in Naples, and this city was for him simply "un gîte d'étape": he arrived on the evening of 20 February 1271 and left the next morning (662). Information about Guido and Adenet's journey is to be found in *Les Grosses Parties*, written by Makel, Guido's notary. More than a report of expenses for the crusaders, it documents Adenet's journey in Italy, including Sicily, Trapani, Calatafimi, Alcamo, Termini, Caltavuturo, Polizzi, Gangi, Nicosia, Troina, Randazzo, Taormina, Messina Catona, Seminara (in Calabria), Monteleone (now Vibo Valentia), Nicastro, Martirano, Cosenza, Tarsia, Trebisacce, Rocca di Nieto, Policoro, Scanzano, Torre di Mare, Matera, Gravina, Barletta, Foggia, Troja, Benevento, Acerra, Napoli, and many central and northern cities from Florence to Aosta. Makel already speaks of the *Chastellain de l'uef* (n 477), without mentioning its relationship to Virgil.

Surprisingly, many intellectuals and men of the clergy, scholars of the caliber of John of Salisbury, talk about Virgil as a magician and a thaumaturge, helping the city of Naples. Passing through Naples in 1160, John of Salisbury heard and noted that Virgil helped to clean the city's air, infected by numerous flies, by making a bronze fly under the influence of a constellation. Among the clergy, besides Jacopo, from Varazze's accounts a few years after Salisbury's report, Bishop Corrado of Querfurt, Arrigo VII's chancellor in 1194, wrote to another ecclesiastic in Hildesheim of a glass bottle that he had seen containing a miniature model of Naples. This account is similar to the widespread legend about the Castle of the Egg that recounts how Virgil put an egg through the tight neck of a carafe, which he then put into a cage that hung under the castle. The destiny of Naples was to be linked forever to the egg.

Accounts of Virgil the magician and healer in the city of Naples can also be found in thirteenth-century historical accounts, such as the *Otia Imperialia* (1211), written by Gervasio of Tilbury, a professor in Bologna. Even a philosopher like Alekandre Neckam wrote in a book of natural history about a golden leech made by Virgil to disinfect the city from the dead animals left in the ditches, as did many others: twelfth-century poets Pietro D'Eboli and Cino da Pistoia and Antonio Pucci in the fourteenth century. All the legends related to Virgil the magician and healer, especially for the benefit of the city of Naples, are compiled in Domenico Comparetti's *Virgil in the Middle Ages* and, more recently,

¹ Translation in English is mine unless otherwise noted. About Adenet's visit to Naples, see also Sabatini 36; Henry 661-74.

Dattilo's *Castel dell'Ovo. Storie e leggende di Napoli*, a study that focuses on the legends related to the Castle of the Egg².

Considering how popular this one legend related to the Castle of the Egg is among intellectuals and ordinary people, I wondered about the impact it would have on Boccaccio's imagination. Did Boccaccio know the legend, and if he did, what was his reaction? Already during his Neapolitan years, Boccaccio used to condemn the "fabuloso," that in the *Genealogia* will be categorized as the fourth type of *fabula*.

I found no mention of the Castle of the Egg in Boccaccio's writings until the day I came across Francesco Sabatini's quick reference to the manuscript Laurenziano Strozzi 152. The Laurenziano Strozzi kept in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence is an illuminated exemplary of Jacopo Alighieri's commentary on *The Divine Comedy*. Maybe — Francesco Sabatini (75) and Alessandra Periccioli Saggese (49-67; nn 67-68) suggest— the Strozzi 152 is one of the illuminated manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy*, like the codex of the Arsenal in Paris, written elsewhere and only illuminated in the middle of the fourteenth century in Naples or by Neapolitan artists. Besides some illuminations of scenes from Dante's poem, the Strozzi 152 contains glosses and notes in Neapolitan dialect and, at the foot of the page, some signatures, names of Neapolitans, and verses in Latin on the Castle of the Egg that have been attributed to Boccaccio and Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte. On the basis of Boccaccio's defense of poetry and, in particular, his reaction to the "fabuloso," together with the relationship he established with Pietro and the possible dates when he and Pietro could have written those verses in Naples, I reached the conclusion that Boccaccio knew the legends but he would ignore them. Attributing those verses to a collaboration between Boccaccio and Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte creates a Middle Ages as mythical as the fanciful legend itself!

Adenet's verses on Virgil in Naples deserve mention, since they offer a singular version of the Castle of the Egg legend. According to Adenet, there used to be two castles (vv.1649-62). One of them collapsed into the sea, because the egg on which it was built broke. Adenet is definitely the first to offer this variation. Adenet's verses are also unique, because, for 200 verses, he concentrates more on Virgil's activity in Naples than in Rome; the obverse was typically true at that time. Apart

² Comparetti believes that the legend linking Virgil to the Castle of the Egg started circulating only in the fourteenth century and not before. However, as Makel's report shows, Adenet is not the first in the fourteenth century to narrate the story of the castle built on a egg, attributing it to the poet Virgil. Henry (662n1) argues against Comparetti and John Webster Spargo ("Virgil the necromancer," *Studies in Virgilian Legends*) that, as Makel's 1270 report shows, documents predating the fourteenth century mention the Castle of the Egg. For more bibliography and insights into the reception of the legend related to Virgil the magician in Naples, see Tassinari and Izzo.

from Makel's report, before the *Cleomadés*, the *Image du monde de maître Gossouin* documents the magic origin of the city founded on an egg, just as Adenet describes it. Here, as well as in Makel's report, Virgil is not associated with the legend of the Neapolitan castle:

Si fonda une grant cité/ sur un uef/ par tel poesté
 Que quant aucuns l'uef remuoit,
 Toute la cité en croloit,
 Et com plus fort le croloit on
 Tant croloit plus tout environ
 La vile et en haut et en plain. ("A great city was founded/ on a egg/
 so powerful/ that if somebody removed the egg, /the entire city would
 fall" [1:179])³.

A strictly Neapolitan text gives a full account of the legends about Virgil the Magician that were circulating: the *Cronaca di Partenope*,⁴ or *Croniche de la inclita Città de Napole*. Written after the *Cleomadés*, in the kingdom of Robert of Anjou, the *Cronica* refers to all the magic powers attributed to Virgil: the healing herbs of Montevergine that treat the illnesses of men ("Infermità delli huomini"); a bronze horse that guarantees health to all the horses in Naples; an arrow that was launched against the volcano Vesuvio; the magical construction of the therapeutic baths in Pozzuoli and the uses of their healing steam. Finally, the anonymous author does not fail to mention the castle on an egg that determines Naples's destiny.⁵ Sabatini is right when he claims that the *Cronica's* tone flows between invention and reality, fable and history, the serious and the entertaining, especially when it describes the origins of the castle, built from the first egg laid by a chicken:

Come consacrò lo ovo al Castello de l'Ovo, dove pigliò il nome (How Virgil consecrated the egg at the Castle of the Egg named after it):

Era in del tempo de lo ditto Virgilio un castello edificato dentro mare, sovra uno scoglio, come perfì mo è, il quale se chiamava lo Castello Marino overo di Mare, in dell'opera del quale castello Virgilio, delectandose con soe arte, consacrò un ovo, il primo che fece una gallina: lo quale ovo puose dentro una caraffa per lo più stritto forame de la detta caraffa, la quale caraffa et ovo fe'ponere dentro una gabia di ferro suttilissimamente lavorata. E la detta gabia, la quale contineva la caraffa e l'ovo, fe'ligare o appendere o chiovare con alcune lamine di ferro sotto uno trave di cerqua che stava appoggiato per traverso a le mura d'una camarella fatta studiosamente per questa occasione con doe fossice, per le quali intrava il lume; e con grande diligenza e solennità la fe'guardare in -de-la detta cammarella in luogo segreto e fatto

³ On those verses see Dattilo and also Comparetti, *Virgilio* (II 179).

⁴ Monti thinks that the *Cronica* was composed between 1326-1348.

⁵ Dattilo 1-16. Cf. also Anneschino; Maiuri; Sabatini, *Napoli Angioina* 249n133.

siguro da bone porte e chiavature di ferro, imperoché da quell'ovo, da lo quale lo Castello pigliò il nome, pendevano tutti i fatti del Castello. Li antiqui nostri tennero che dall'ovo pendevano tutti li fatti e la fortuna del Castello Marino: zoè lo Castello dovia durare tanto quanto l'ovo si conservava cossì guardato. ("There was in the time of Virgil a castle built in the sea, on a rock, and it was called the sea castle, at which Virgil consecrated an egg, the first egg laid by a chicken. Virgil put the egg through the tight neck of a carafe, which he put into a finely wrought iron cage. Virgil asked that this cage containing the egg and the carafe be tied, hung, or nailed with some strips of iron under an oak girder that was lying across the walls of a little room where, for this occasion, two little holes were made so that the light could pass. With extreme care and solemnity, he kept it in a secret spot in this room that he made sure was well locked with solid doors and big iron locks, since every event related to the castle would depend on that egg, after which the castle was named. Our ancestors maintained that everybody's destiny and that of the Castle of the Sea would depend on that egg; that is, the castle would survive as long as the egg was kept in that way" [Altamura 81]).

Questions arise about the origins of such superstitions surrounding the Latin poet. One answer may be found in Maurilio Adriani's study on the Arabic Virgil.⁶ According to Adriani, Virgil was an Arab, and around the thirteenth century, Latin translations of his writings in Toledo became known to the western world thanks to a secret science that he possessed: the *Refulgentia*. Routeboeuf's *Bataille des sept arts* also states that, "De Toulete vint et de Naples Qui des batailles sont les chapes/ a une nuit la Nigromance:" Naples, like Toledo, were both famous as seats of necromancy.⁷

The *Cronaca di Partenope* also reports that Virgil's remains are kept in the same place where the egg is ("in parva capsula lignea in quadam capella, ubi in una amphora vitrea est illud ovum" [Dattilo 13]), that is in the Castle of the Egg. In this regard, Petrarck recounts a funny anecdote. He went with Robert of Anjou to pay homage to the poet, whose tomb is at the foot of the Posillipo hill, where Boccaccio also believed the poet was resting. When the coach was passing the Castle of the Egg, Robert reminded Petrarck about the legend related to Virgil and the egg and also asked him about Virgil perforating the hill of Posillipo and other enchantments attributed to the Latin poet. Petrarck, who would not believe the legends produced by the "vulgus insulsum," answered the king jokingly: he knew Virgil was a great poet but not a marble-cutter who could pierce a mountain or a builder of castles in the sea.⁸

⁶ See also Izzo n 6.

⁷ I owe the reference to Routeboeuf to Izzo's "Virgilio."

⁸ For Petrarck's visit in Naples, cf. Wilkins and also Anecchino, *Il Petrarca a Pozzuoli*; Sabatini, 82-83 and nn122 and 129.

Non longe a Puteolis, Falernus collis attollitur, famoso palmite nobilis. Inter Falernum et mare, mons est saxeus, hominum manibus perfossus, quod vulgus insulsum a Virgilio magicis cantaminibus factum putat. Ita clarorum fama hominum, non veris contenta laudibus, saepe etiam fabulis viam facit. De quo cum me olim Robertus regno clarus, sed praeclarus ingenio ac literis, quid sentirem multis astantibus percontatus esset, humanitate fretus regia, qua non reges modo, sed homines vicit, iocans, nusquam me legisse marmorarium fuisse Virgilium respondi, quod ille serenissimae nutu frontis approbans, non illic magiae, sed ferri vestigia esse confessus est ("Not far from Pozzuoli, rises the hill called Falerno, a noble place famous for its wine. Between Falerno and the sea there is a rocky mountain, dug out by man and that the common people foolishly believed was done by Virgil with magic incantations. In this way, the fame of illustrious men, not satisfied with sincere praise, gives way to fanciful tales. Robert, famous for his kingdom but even more so for his talent and culture, once asked me in the presence of many people what I thought about this. Impressed by Robert's regal 'humanitas,' that seduced both kings and simple people, I answered jokingly that I had not read anywhere that Virgil was a marble-cutter. Robert, expressing his approval with a good-natured nod of the head, admitted that in that place there was no trace of magic, but only of iron" [*Itinerarium Syriacum* 36]).⁹

This is not the only time Petrarch reacts to what he believed to be a stupid legend. In a 1352 letter to the Prior Francesco Nelli (Familiars Book 13/6), Petrarch refers to the ridiculous rumour about Virgil being a necromancer:

Dicam quod magis rideas: ipse ergo, quo nemo usquam divinationi inimicior vivit aut magie, nonnunquam inter hos optimos rerum iudices propter Maronis amicitiam nigromanticus dictus sum. En quo studia nostra dilapsa sunt! O nugas odibiles ridendasque! ("I will tell you something that will amuse you even more: I myself, the greatest living enemy of divination and magic, have often been called a necromancer by those worthy judges because of my affection for Virgil. What hateful and comical absurdity!" [*Letters* 118]).

Clearly, Petrarch is the first to strongly reject any legend related to Virgil the Magician with his answer to King Robert: they are just the foolish beliefs of common people!

Naples remains esoteric and magic to Adenet, the anonymous writer of the *Cronaca di Partenope*, and even to the compiler of the *Statutes of the Order of the Holy Spirit, or of the Knot*. In the prologue to the statutes of the Order founded by Louis of Taranto in 1352, headquartered in the Castle of the Egg, the legend of the egg is mentioned:

⁹ Cf. also Sabatini, *Napoli Angioina* 248n123.

“Pensiamo d’indire, a Dio piacendo, la prima festa nel Castel dell’Ovo del meraviglioso periglio che Virgilio costruì” (“We are contemplating, God willing, the first celebration of our Order, in the Castle of the Egg that Virgil built”).¹⁰

Boccaccio knew about the *Statutes* as he reveals in Letter XIII to Francesco Nelli. Given the king’s lack of culture, a “stultus puer” and, according to Boccaccio’s declaration in this letter, the real mentor of the Order would be Niccolò Acciaiuoli, who was also its historiographer. For Boccaccio, Acciaiuoli was the one who drew up the *Statutes* “scrisse in francesco dei fatti de’ cavalieri del Santo Spirito, in quello stile che già per addietro scrissono alcuni della Tavola ritonda: nel quale che cose da ridere ed al tutto false abbia posto, egli sa” (“in the style and in the language in which people wrote in the past about the Round table: in which, if he put ridiculous and false things, he is the only one to know” [Auzzas 811 n358; Lee 145]).¹¹ This declaration confirms that the legends that were circulating on Virgil and Naples, just as any other fanciful tales that Acciaiuoli included in the *Statutes*, could not have had an impact on the young Boccaccio, who considered them “ridiculous and false.”

However, Boccaccio had high respect for Virgil, his poem, and his remains. As the letters show, Boccaccio, like Petrarch, was convinced that Virgil was buried in Naples, based on reliable sources, such as Donato’s *Life of Virgil* (“Translata [...] eius ossa [...]neapolim fuere, sepultaque via Puteolana” (“His bones were transported to Naples and buried in Pozzuoli’s street”), but he was also convinced by Giovanni Barrili that Virgil’s tomb was on the slopes of the “Falerno Collis” (Auzzas 753 n15), as he and Petrarch would call the hill of Saint Elmo in the area of Posillipo. In Letter XXIV, Boccaccio says that the hills of Posillipo have to be venerated, because their roots hide Virgil’s remains.¹² In Letter II, he describes himself walking around Virgil’s tomb and claims that “virgiliana teneret Neapolis,” (“I was staying in the Virgilian Naples” [II 2]). Moreover, in Letter VIII he still refers to “virgilianae Neapoli.” Letter I ends with an unmistakable note of tribute to the place where Boccaccio believed Virgil was buried: “Data sub monte Falerno apud busta Maronis Virgilii nonas aprilis III, anno vero Incarnationis Verbi divini MCCCXXXVIII” (“From the slopes of the hill Falerno at Virgil’s tumb, April 3 1339”) Boccaccio was a passionate vis-

¹⁰ On the Order of the Holy Spirit, or the Order of the Knot, and its *Statutes*, see Léonard and more recently Morosini’s entry on “Niccolò Acciaiuoli” with an updated bibliography in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

¹¹ More on Boccaccio’s Letter XIII in Morosini, “‘Polyphonic’ Parthenope.”

¹² In this regard, it is interesting to note that the only mention of the city of Naples in the *Divine Comedy* occurs in *Purgatory*, 3:25-27, when Dante refers to Virgil’s tomb.

itor to Naples. Despite his familiarity with the legends, this city remains for him the cradle of "spiriti magni" ("the great spirits"), and the legends he mentions are always related to Virgil, the poet of the *Eneide*, its heroes, and their adventures (McGregor 1991).

In the *Filocolo*, Boccaccio pays homage to Virgil in several instances, referring to Aeneas's vicissitudes and, in a very sophisticated and discreet way, to the legends related to him by making Florio, the young protagonist of the story, stop twice in the city. Florio leaves on a ship to look for his Biancifiore, who has been sold to the Lord of Alexandria. A shipwreck brings him to Naples, where accidentally he meets Fiammetta and other Neapolitan aristocrats, who entertain themselves with the "Questioni d'amore" ("Questions of love"). On his way back to Marmorina, once he has found his beloved Biancifiore, Florio travels again to Naples. This time he means to stop and visit the city and its "antiche meraviglie" ("ancient marvels" [*Filocolo* V 5, 2]).

Naples is the privileged space to assess Florio's upbringing in the middle of the novel.¹³ In the first part of the story, Florio's actions are crystallized into immobility due to his fear for Biancifiore, who was sold to merchants by Florio's parents. In Book IV, after having taken part in the "questioning" of a group of young aristocratic Neapolitans, led by the beautiful Fiammetta, Florio goes back to his inn, where he spends a thoughtful night.

Ma perché il tempo che si perde, che più che mai gli gravava, passasse con meno malinconia, egli andando per li vicini paesi di Partenope si diletta di vedere l'antichità di Baia, e il Mirteo mare, e 'l monte Mesano, e massimamente quel luogo donde Enea, menato dalla Sibilla, andò a vedere le infernali ombre. Egli cercò Piscina Mirabile, e lo imperial bagno di Tritoli, e quanti altri le vicine parti ne tengono. Egli volle ancora parte vedere dell'inescrutabile monte Barbaro, e le ripe di Pozzuolo, e il tempio di Apollino, e l'oratorio della Sibilla, cercando intorno intorno il lago d'Averno, e similmente i monti pieni di solfo vicini a questi luoghi: e in questa maniera andando più giorni, con minore malinconia trapassò che fatto avria dimorando ("In order to pass with less melancholy the time he was wasting, and which weighed on him, more and more than ever now, he visited the towns in the vicinity of Parthenope, and took delight in seeing the antiquities of Baiae, and the sea of Mirteo, and Mount Miseno, and especially that place where Aeneas was brought by the Sybil and went to see the infernal shades. He sought out Piscina Mirabile, and the imperial bath of Tritolis, and all the other sights contained in the neighboring areas. He was also eager to see part of the inaccessible Mount Barbaro, and the banks of Pozzuoli, and the temple of Apollino, and the oratory of the Sybil, and searched around the lake of Avernus, and likewise the

¹³ More on this particular question in Kirkham 466 n 17.

sulphurous mountains near those places; and in this way he toured for several days, which he spent with less melancholy than he would have done if had been idle" [*Filocolo* IV 4, 73]).

Once Florio finds Biancifiore, he returns with her to Naples. This time, it is not a shipwreck that brings him to the "ancient Parthenope," since he specifically asks his mariners to chart their route to the city:

... ma però che nelle virtuose menti ozioso perdimento di tempo non può con consolazione d'animo passare, Filocolo con la sua Biancifiore cercarono di vedere i tiepidi bagni di Baia, e il vicino luogo all'antica sepoltura di meseno, donde ad Enea fu largito l'andare a vedere le regioni de'neri spiriti e del suo padre; e cercarono i guasti luoghi di Cummo, e 'l mare, le cui rive, abondevoli di verdi mortelle, Mirteo il fanno chiamare, e l'antico Pozzuolo, con le circostanti anticaglie, e ancora quante cose mirabili in quelle parti le reverende antichità per li loro autori rapresentano: e in quel paese traendo lunga dimoranza, niuno giorno li tiene a quel diletto, che l'altro davanti li avea tenuti. Essi tal volta guardando l'antiche maraviglie vanno e gli animi come gli autori di quelle diventano magni. ("Since in a virtuous mind, the lazy waste of time cannot enter without disturbing the spirit, Filocolo and his Biancifiore sought out the warm baths of Baiae, and the area near the ancient sepulcher of Miseno, where Aeneas was allowed to go and visit the regions of the dark spirits and of his father; and they sought out the ruined places of Cumae, and the sea whose shores were abundant in green myrtles, which caused it to be called Mirteo, and ancient Pozzuoli, with its surrounding antiquities, and all the remarkable things in those areas that are mentioned in revered ancient texts by their authors [...]. Sometimes they went to see the ancient marvels and became as great in their spirits as their creators" [*Filocolo* V 5, 1]).

An entire chapter is devoted to a journey through the cities that have some link to the *Eneide* (III 3). Boccaccio makes the fugitive Fileno visit various meaningful places: Chiusi, Aventine, Rome, the ancient walls of Alba. Then he went southward:

si lasciò dietro le grandissime Alpi e i monti i quali aspettavano l'oscurissima distruzione del nobile sangue d'Aquilone, e pervenne a Gaieta, eterna memoria della cara balia di Enea. *E di quella pervenne per le salate onde a Pozzuolo, avendo prima vedute l'antiche Baie e le sue tiepide onde, quivi per sovenimento degli umani corpi poste dagl'Iddii* ("He left behind the great Alps and the mountains that were awaiting humiliating destruction from the noble blood of Aquilone, and he arrived at Gaeta, an eternal memorial to the beloved nurse of Aeneas. *And from there he came by the salt waves to Pozzuoli, having first seen ancient Baiae and its warm waters*" [*Filocolo* III 33, 8. My italics]).

Boccaccio does not attribute the baths to Virgil, as the legend wants us to believe, but to the gods who placed them there “for the restoration of human bodies.”

Boccaccio shows his concern with the literary Naples more than with the plebeian one that included the repertory of legends and superstitions, as I discussed in a previous work.¹⁴

These investigations bring me to the manuscript Laurenziano Strozzi 152. At the bottom of the page, which is very difficult to read and packed on the left margin with scrambled notes, I found the verses on the Castle of the Egg. The few verses give a brief account of what is said about Virgil and the egg in a carafe and a signature “Iohannes de Certaldo” which is hardly perceptible. Nevertheless, I still believe that those verses cannot be attributed either to Boccaccio or Pietro.

Pietro (1306/8-1384) was a Neapolitan judge who developed an interest in Latin poetry, strongly influenced by Petrarch’s followers; namely Barbato da Sulmona, who praised Pietro highly as a “amplissimus Pyeridum hospes” (Hortis 347-48; Vatasso 1904). Pietro probably came to know Boccaccio during his last visit to Naples in 1370¹⁵ and both shared the defense of poetry against those who tried to condemn it. To be sure Pietro wrote to Boccaccio congratulating him for the treatise on poetry and he also gives an account of an argument with another jurist who dared to attack poetry ((Billanovich I 44-58). Pietro was in fact the first to read the earliest version of the *Genealogia*, although Boccaccio had no intention to send it to him (Auzzas Letter XX 678-81).¹⁶

Yet, although the two intellectuals developed a mutual respect, especially following Pietro’s reading of the *Genealogia*, we cannot assume that they wrote the verses based on such a fabulous and superstitious story and, moreover, in Latin! Why would Boccaccio choose to write about the castle, when he never mentioned the legend related to Virgil anywhere in his texts? Why would he choose to write these verses with Pietro? Pietro had a strong classical background and, like Petrarch eventually, could only mock a legend about Virgil. As far as Boccaccio is concerned, his approach to the “fabuloso,” the fanciful — that it is only the product of the ignorant—¹⁷ would not allow him to

¹⁴ Cf. Morosini “Polyphonic Parthenope.”

¹⁵ It is still arguable when was the last time Boccaccio went to Naples. For more on Boccaccio’s visits to Naples and an extensive bibliography on this topic see Morosini, “Polyphonic Parthenope” n13.

¹⁶ In Letter XX Boccaccio gives to Pietro a full account of the vicissitudes of the *Genealogia Deorum* and how the first version of the book ended in Pietro’s hands. In fact, Boccaccio had initially given the *Genealogia* to Ugo di Sanseverino in 1370-1371.

¹⁷ In the Filocolo Boccaccio openly attributes the “fabuloso parlare,” that is the fanciful chatter, to the ignorant (I 1).

believe in such a story or necromancy. On a more general level, Boccaccio's approach to necromancy and necromancers can be traced back to the question Menedon asks Fiammetta during the "Questioni d'amore", the well-known episode of the *Filocolo* (IV 31-34) and another version in *Decameron* X 5, which present important differences.¹⁸ A study of those differences validates the hypothesis that, if not indifferent to the fabulous and to necromancy, Boccaccio tries to rationalize and minimize them.

The story involves Tarolfo, in love with a lady married to a nobleman. To get rid of her faithful admirer, the lady challenges him with an impossible request: she will be his, if he can offer her in January a big, beautiful garden, flourishing with trees, flowers, and fruits. Tarolfo departs to find someone who can help him to satisfy the lady's request, and after many days, he encounters Tebano, a middle-aged, poorly dressed man, who is picking herbs to make healing potions. Tarolfo tells him of the beloved lady's unusual request, and Tebano promises him he can make it happen, if he is well rewarded. Tebano keeps the promise, and a surprised and disappointed lady is offered a flourishing garden in winter. When her husband learns about his wife's promise to Tarolfo, he insists she keep it, but Tarolfo releases her from her promise. The necromancer Tebano, who seems to be worried only about his gain, finally gives up.

In the *Filocolo*, the "bellissima dimanda" and beautiful story proposed by Menedon, although they involve a necromancer, have one main purpose: to establish, for the benefit of the courtly gathering at Fiammetta's court, who is more liberal, Tarolfo or Tebano. Above all, as I show elsewhere,¹⁹ the tale is extremely functional to the story of Florio and Biancifiore and, in particular, to illuminate Florio's upbringing. From Menedon's question and Fiammetta's answer, Florio learns about liberality as part of his inner growth. Necromancy is not at stake here, but Boccaccio does not miss his chance to make his point about it and the legends about Virgil the Magician. If it is true that Boccaccio draws most of the details of Tebano's episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is also true that he contaminates it with other models; namely, the medieval legends that were circulating Naples about Virgil. It is no coincidence that among the many legends about Virgil the Magician, one, as confirmed by Comparetti (49-54), relates to his power to make gardens flourish in winter.²⁰ If Boccaccio differs from Ovid, it is not

¹⁸ See also Branca's note 3 to *Decameron* X 9,70.

¹⁹ Morosini, "La morte verbale nel *Filocolo*" and a forthcoming book *Per difetto reintegrare. Una lettura del Filocolo di Giovanni Boccaccio*.

²⁰ Cf. also Quaglio note 42 to *Filocolo* IV 31. Interestingly enough, another legend recounts that Virgil planted on Monte Vergine (a mountain in the region of Naples that still holds

because he misunderstands him, as Quaglio suggests (*Filocolo* IV 31 n 28), but in reaction to fanciful legends.

In the version of the story given in *Decameron* X, 5, Boccaccio seems to have changed his attitude toward necromancy. During the Neapolitan years, when he was writing the *Filocolo*, the legends on Virgil and necromancy in general seem to have upset him more than later in his life, when he assumes a distant and mocking attitude. In both accounts Boccaccio minimizes the role of necromancy but to a greater degree in the *Decameron* through the use of parody. The reader's first encounter with the necromancer is given simply as "e vennegli uno alle mani il quale, dove ben salariato fosse, per arte nigromantica profereva di farlo" ("he got hold of a man who offered to do it by magic, provided he was well-enough paid"). Necromancy is a gainful profession. Moreover, the *Decameron* abbreviates the 16 paragraphs describing the arts and rituals used by Tebano to realize a garden flourishing in the middle of winter in the *Filocolo* to one line: "il valente uomo in un bellissimo prato vicino alla città con sue arti fece sì che la mattina apparve, [...] uno dei più bbe' giardini" ("the magician employed his skills to such good effect that there appeared next morning [...], one of the fairest gardens that anyone had seen" [*Decameron* X 5, 10. My italics]), Boccaccio simply says that the man with *his skills* made the beautiful garden for Messer Ansaldo, the nobleman who requested it. However, the husband, named Gilberto in the *Decameron*, has an eloquent reaction to what his wife has done. His reaction gives another important insight into Boccaccio's approach to necromancy and people who foolishly believe in it. Gilberto has been introduced at the beginning as a pleasant, good-natured man (he has a "buona aria"), and it seems that Boccaccio is trying to say that only good-natured people can believe or fear necromancers. When Gilberto hears about his wife's promise to Ansaldo, he sends her right away to the man. Apparently, he is being generous to his wife, considering her "good intention," like the husband in the *Filocolo* version, but what really motivates Gilberto is his fear of the necromancer:

Per ciò che conosco la purità dello animo tuo, per solverti da' legame della promessa, quello ti concederò che alcun altro non farebbe, *inducendomi ancora la paura del nigromante, al qual forse Messer Ansaldo, se tu il beffassi, far ci farebbe dolente* ("But because I know you were acting from the purest of motives, I shall allow you, so as to be quit of your promise, to do something which possibly no other man would

still holds that name and hosts the Sanctuary of the Lady of MonteVergine) an entire garden of magic and therapeutic herbs. Izzo maintains that a thirteenth-century manuscript kept at the sanctuary of Monte Vergine (it used to be called "Monte di Virgilio"), still documents the presence of such a diabolic garden. See Izzo 4.

permit, being swayed also by my fear of the magician, whom Messer Ansaldo, if you were to play him false, would perhaps encourage to do us a mischief" [Decameron X 5, 15-16]).

In both the *Decameron* and *Filocolo*, even if necromancy is not the protagonist as much as liberality (the theme of the tenth day), Boccaccio opposes Tarolfo's authentic generosity to Gilberto's fears, which are due to his good nature, his "buona aria." He is afraid of the necromancer and what he may do to him and Diadora, and this fear contaminates his apparent act of generosity toward Ansaldo. Finally, the necromancer having witnessed Ansaldo and Gilberto's generosity, he willingly and spontaneously renounces his promised gain.

To fully understand Boccaccio's attitude towards necromancy, I believe one has to look at Decameron X 7: the novella that tells of the widow who is desperately but vainly in love with a man who ignores her.²¹ The widow's maid feels compassion for her lady's sorrows, and she conceives a foolish idea ("entrò in uno sciocco pensiero") to use necromancy to help her out. She then calls out to a student who is passing in the street and whom the lady had in the past treated badly (VIII 7,47). In this novella, Boccaccio's emphasis is, on one side and from the very beginning, on the student's knowledge "who studied in Paris with the purpose, not of selling his knowledge for gain as many people do, but of learning the reasons and causes of things," and on the other, on the irrationality of the maid, who believes in necromancy. Moreover, in two instances, he criticizes the lady's poor judgment: she was "più inamorata che savia" (being more a slave to her love than a model of common sense, [VIII 7,55]) to the point of forgetting that she is giving the student the chance to avenge himself for the tortures she had previously imposed to him. If he had any real magic power, he would use it to save himself from her: "la donna poco savia, senza pensare che se lo scolare saputa avesse nigromantia per sé adoperata l'avrebbe, pose l'animo alle parole della sua fante" ("the lady was not very intelligent, and it never occurred to her that if the scholar had known anything about magic he would have used it in his own behalf [VIII 7, 48]).

Furthermore, I believe that Boccaccio's approach to necromancers is here explicit: if a necromancer knew how to use magic, he would use it for himself. This criticism applies to the so-called necromancer in *Decameron* X 5 but, in particular, to the case of Tebano in the *Filocolo*. Here, the first encounter with Tebano quite eloquently announces Boccaccio's parodic and sceptical attitude towards necromancy:

²¹ See also Decameron X 9, 70, when the Saladino orders his necromancer "la cui arte già esperimentata aveva" to bring Torello during the night in his own bed to Pavia. Other stories in the Decameron involving magic are III 8 and VIII 9.

. . . un uomo non giovane né di troppa lunga età barbuto, e i suoi vestimenti giudicavano lui dovere essere povero, picciolo di persona e sparuto molto, il quale andava cogliendo erbe e cavando con un picciolo coltello diverse radici, delle quail un limbo della sua gonnella avea pieno. ("A man who was neither young nor very old, bearded –and to judge from his clothing poor-, small of build and much shrunken, going about gathering herbs and digging with a tiny knife various roots with which he had filled a fold of his garment" [*Filocolo* IV 31,11]).

He corresponds so much to the type that Boccaccio is mocking that when "Tarolfo saw him he marveled and much feared he might be other than human." The poor man is there by necessity, not for his own pleasure. In other words, as will be said in the *Decameron*, if he were a magician, he would use magic to help himself. Instead, he is sweating to gather herbs to make healing potions.

Io sono di Tebe, e Tebano è il mio nome, e per questo piano vo cogliendo queste erbe, acciò che de' liquori d' esse facendo alcune cose necessarie e utili a diverse infermità, io abbia onde vivere, e a questa ora *necessità e non diletto mi ci costringe di venire* ("I come from Thebes, and Tebano is my name, and I am going over this plain collecting these herbs so that by making things necessary and useful for various infirmities out of their liquors, I may find means to live; and it is *need and not pleasure that constrains me to come here at this hour*" [*Filocolo* IV 31,13] My italics).

Tebano is disheveled, and he is aware of it; in fact, he says to Tarolfo that he, like other people, judges a man by his clothes: "ma molte volte sotto vilissimi drappi grandissimo tesoro di scienza si nasconde" ("but many times great treasures of knowledge are hidden under the vilest of coverings" [*Filocolo* IV 31,18]). Despite the fact that this theme is dear to Boccaccio (see *Decameron* VI,2 and *Comedie delle Ninfe*), in the *Filocolo*, the comment has a parodic connotation.

In the *Filocolo*, the necromancer is a poor old man who is also greedy. The very first question he asks Tarolfo is about what he has to gain by satisfying the request. If he were a real necromancer, he would neither be sweating in the field nor working greedily for Tarolfo to make money. In fact, he adds: "*se questo facessi, a me non bisognerebbe d'andare più cogliendo l'erbe*" ("if I did this, I would no longer have to go gathering herbs" [IV 31,19-20. My italics]). Tarolfo confirms this remark, when he says to Tebano: "mai non ti bisognerà più affannare per divenire ricco," ("you will never more have to labor to become rich") if he helps him out.

The description of the making of the magic garden is openly parodic. The night is moonlit, a typical night for witches: "[...] gli uccelli, le fiere e gli uomini riposavano senza niuno mormorio, e sopra i monti le

non cadute frondi stavano senza alcuno movimento, e l'umido aere in pace si riposava: solamente le stelle luceano [...]” (“the birds and beasts and men rested without a murmur, and on the mountains the leaves that had not fallen stood still without any movement, and the humid air rested peacefully. Only the stars shone” [*Filocolo* IV 31,24]). Tebano, naked, “barefoot, with his hair loose on his naked shoulders, all alone” starts his mission, but he is definitely not a magician; he is just a professional with herbs and sauces, as he says in his prayer to the goddess Ceres (IV 31,27). Tebano knows from years of experience how to make a garden flourish before the spring. When the cart carried by two dragons takes him from Spain to the Ganges river together with all those ritual altar offerings, Boccaccio is again parodying a repertory that he cleverly uses, referring to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (VII, 215-16; Quaglio IV 31, 28 n34).

When Tarolfo sees the husband’s liberality and releases the lady from her promise, the necromancer’s first reaction is fear for his reward, but when he knows the husband and Tarolfo’s generosity, he renounces his promised treasure. Menedon comments on Tebano, whom he believes to be the most liberal:

abbandonate le sue contrade, oramai vecchio, e venuto quivi per guadagnare i promessi doni, e affannatosi per recare a fine ciò che promesso avea, avendoli guadagnati, ogni cosa rimise, rimanendosi povero come prima (“Tebano, who left his home at an advanced age and came here to earn the promised reward, and labored to bring to completion what he had promised, and having earned it remitted everything and remained as poor as he was before” [*Filocolo* IV 31, 55]).

The verb *affannarsi*, to worry, recurs, proving what I have just said. When the queen answers Menedon’s question, she believes the husband to be liberal, but Menedon emphasizes the old man’s “worries,” painfully trying to satisfy Tarolfo’s request: “E chi dubiterà che Tebano fosse poverissimo, se si riguarda ch’egli, abandonati i notturni riposi, per sostentare la sua vita, ne’ dubbiosi luoghi andava cogliendo l’erbe e scavando radici?” (“and who will doubt that Tebano was very poor, if one considers that he abandoned his sleep at night and went gathering herbs and digging roots in dangerous places, to sustain his existence?” [IV 33,6]). Boccaccio parodies magic and necromancy; he deflates it by adding magic elements, such as the cart. Magic is impossible; only human efforts can yield results.

Finally, the episode of the flourishing garden in the *Filocolo* also confirms that Boccaccio was familiar with the legends related to Virgil’s magic and healing powers, but he, like Dante, simply pays tribute to Virgil as the champion of Reason, the great poet of the *Eneide* and recognizes his presence in the Parthenopeian city. Naples remains the city

of the "great spirits," and the legend of Virgil as a necromancer and magician had little impact on him, as he would generally not take necromancy seriously. Boccaccio would not be tempted to give credence to the tales of magic related to the Castle of the Egg, as Adenet le Roi and the anonymous author of the *Cronaca di Partenope* would do, to the point of not even mentioning them, as even Petrarch did. Attributing to Boccaccio the verses on the margins of the ms Strozzi 152 only continues to create legends around a mythical Middle Ages. The short passage in Letter XIII to Francesco Nelli best expresses Boccaccio's attitude toward the legend that surrounded Virgil, the Castle of the Egg, and necromancy and superstition in general: they are fanciful legends and like the stories that Acciaiuoli narrates in the French Statutes, a laughing matter: "Cose da ridere e del tutto false!"

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