Geospatial Visualizations for the Study of Boccaccio

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Abstract

This essay asks a very general question: what can mapmaking do to help us better understand the life and work of a medieval author such as Boccaccio? This question relates to Papio's own engagement with Boccaccio's work as a "geographer" and "topographer" in *De Montibus*, and draws on pedagogical practices recently developed within the framework of the oldest among the VHL projects, the Decameron Web, that Papio contributed to create, back in the late 1990s.

What can mapmaking do to help us better understand the life and work of Giovanni Boccaccio?[1] The short answer is that we cannot know until we do it. A fuller response would begin with a look at what analogous work has been done and then move on to some introductory experimentation. This, in short, is the purpose of this brief essay. We shall open this analysis with a sort of interpretive framework, one that establishes at least in broad strokes the approach that will be of use to us. The field of geocriticism has emerged from the basic idea, which is nothing new to medievalists, that the study of literature may be enriched by methodologies traditionally used in other disciplines, especially in the social sciences. In geocriticism, literary theorists use tools related to the study of geographic space to investigate literature.[2] As usually happens in the early years of new theories, some proponents of geocriticism have vigorously sought to provoke reactions, and these reactions tend to range from stubborn antagonism to wholehearted discipleship. One interesting example of intellectual provocation may be found on the back dustjacket of Franco Moretti's 2005 study entitled *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. There we read:

> Franco Moretti argues heretically that literature scholars should stop reading books
> and start counting, graphing, and mapping them instead. He insists that such a move

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[1] Everything useful in this essay comes from work done by Albert Lloret and myself on our critical edition of the *De montibus*, which has been generously sponsored by the National Endowment of the Humanities. All translations not attributed to others are my own.

[2] The bibliography of this burgeoning field is in a fervidly productive period. For the general outlines, see Tally, Westphal (*Géocritique*). Westphal (*Le ravage*) presents a series of ideas that are specifically thought-provoking in relation to the present essay.

could bring new lustre to a tired field, one that in some respects is among "the most backward disciplines in the academy."

In the light of Moretti's actual use of maps inside the book, however, it is clear that the blurb on the outside was likely stuck on by the marketing department. There is quite a lot of utility in his approach here, and perhaps even more in his earlier study of the European novel (*Atlas*), which presents roughly one hundred visual representations of space in a variety of a literary works. Among some of the most fascinating are geographical relationships in "Jane Austen's Britain," the curious distribution of the settings of "British Gothic tales" across the map of Europe, and a map that portrays the paths of Manzoni's Lucia and Renzo across a countryside that, as we can see at a glance, was enclosed in the triangle formed by Milan, Bergamo, and the Castle of the Innominato. Far from a substitute for the time-tested avenue of literary studies, at least in my opinion, these new views serve to complement them, to enhance our understanding of what we were reading before we were told to stop. In his introduction, he makes a statement that is as helpful as it is unprovocative:

> [G]eography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history "happens,"
> but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes it in depth. Making the
> connection between geography and literature explicit, then – mapping it: because a
> map is precisely that, a connection made visible – will allow us to see some
> significant relationships that have so far escaped us. (Moretti *Atlas*, 3)

In this same spirit, we hypothesize here that geospatial representations of Boccaccio's world – a few pages taken from an unfinished Boccaccio atlas, so to speak – may similarly provide insights into additional things that had escaped our notice.

Before charging right in, though, it is prudent to define a bit more explicitly which parts of Boccaccio's work will be put into sharper focus. Ultimately, we are interested in the way that he conceives of spaces, from oceans and large regions to towns and even small hills, particularly those he does not know firsthand, and what these conceptions can subsequently tell us. But this enormous mosaic can be made only a few tiles at a time. Although he did not travel as widely as Petrarch, Boccaccio's geographical knowledge was far better than that of the vast majority of his coevals. Nevertheless, his firsthand acquaintance with locations and topographical features was perforce limited. The distance and speed of overland travel depended on a variety of factors, including not only the mode of transportation (e.g., walking, on horseback, with a 2- or 4-wheeled cart, alone or with others, and so on), but also the conditions and the terrain (e.g., good or bad weather, solid or muddy roads, ascents and descents, the width of the track, bridges and ferries). What is more, we know that Boccaccio was a rather robust man and, if we believe Petrarch (*Sen.* 5.1), was not especially well suited to long journeys. He probably lived his entire life in a geographic area bounded by the extremes of Avignon in the west, Venice in the north and Calabria in the south. All other locations that appear in his works were known to him through the words of authors and acquaintances.

This simple observation, combined with a map, already tells us something that might have escaped our notice. In Figure 1, you will find a section of a cluster map that illustrates places mentioned by Boccaccio in his masterpiece. Two aspects jump out immediately: first, the *Decameron* is tightly moored to those areas its author knew from actual experience; second, those places he had only heard or read about are still surprisingly present. The ramifications of such data, to use a rather impersonal term, are limited only by the scholar who considers them. For instance, one may be tempted to take another look at Boccaccio's realism, a topic that has generated no small number of studies already. In a comparable way, his contacts with other Mediterranean cultures and realities different from his own could easily be addressed against a representational backdrop such as this.
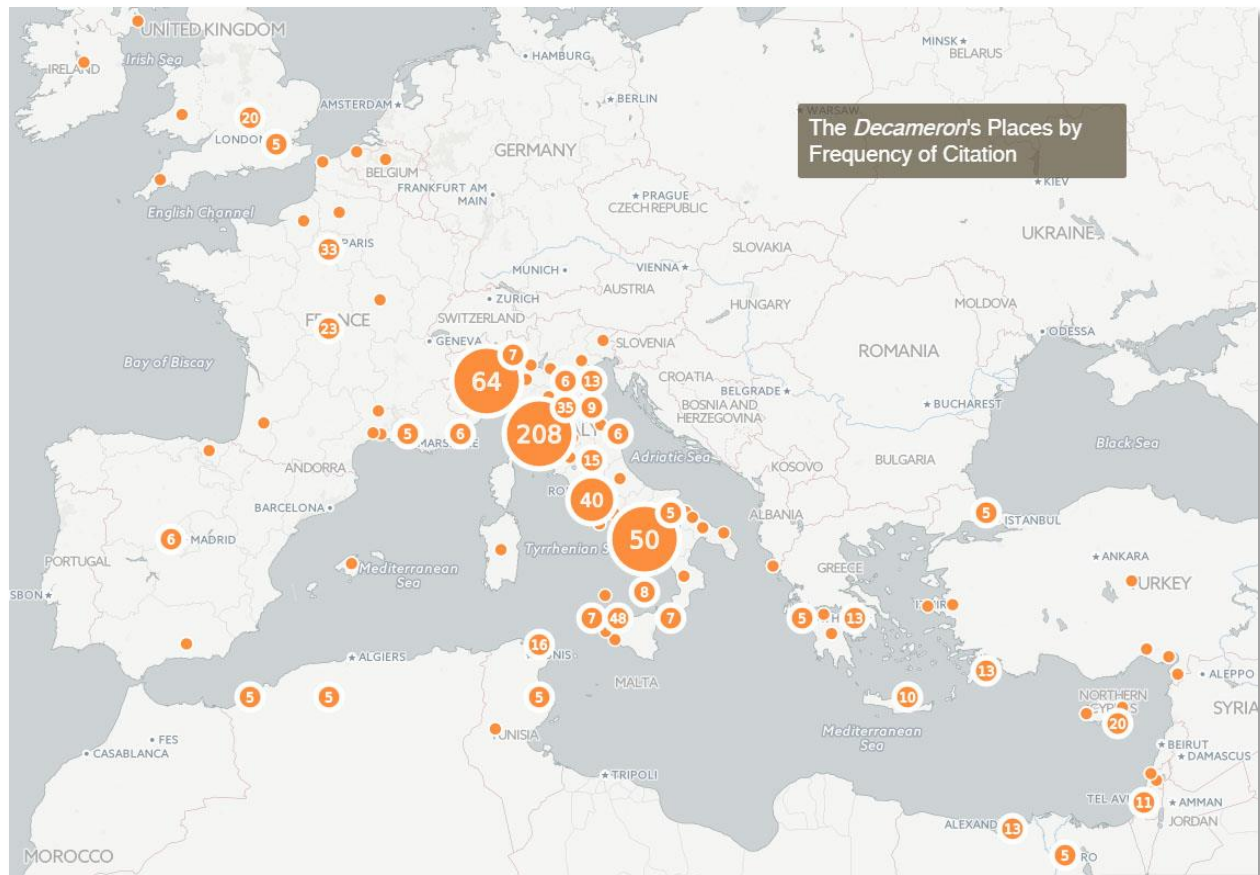
Figure 1

As we increase the granularity of the data, even more potentially suggestive ideas come to mind. Figure 2 shows that, in addition to being an Italian collection of tales, the *Decameron* is substantially Tuscan (which will come as a shock to no one), but with a very meaningful presence of the Mezzogiorno that is by no means limited to sites he visited during his Neapolitan years. Lying beyond those areas are many others, plus cities and islands, fortresses, ports and rivers. Each of these comes with its own ambience, characteristics and history (real or imaginary).

Figure 2

Moving to the level of Florence's *centro storico* (Fig. 3), one sees the distribution of specific named places in the text as dots spread with apparent homogeneity and impartiality across the landmarks you probably already recognize from tourist maps (alongside the number 72, which represents occurrences of the word Firenze). Upon closer inspection, however, this distribution may in reality tell us something different. Consider the shaded area of the Oltrarno, which represents the neighborhood of Boccaccio himself and of those with whom he had the closest relationships in 1352.[3] Now these dots take on a different feel; in a collection of tales that seem to have been kept generally close to geographical areas known personally by their author, never is there mention of that handful of city blocks he knew as his own. Like all new connections, whether or not these mean anything depends on the person who makes them. Our understanding of the world of the *Decameron* has at any rate been enhanced, even if only in the addition of one new "tile," by the use of a decidedly uncomplicated tool of geospatial representation. This first experiment demonstrates plainly that a map, like an alphabetical index or a concordance, can provide an alluring new way to approach an author, a text or a corpus. Unlike other paratexts, though, maps offer a system of coordinates upon which we can plot not only textual elements, but also our own realities. For instance, if you looked at Figure 3 and imagined places in Florence where you have been, you effectively plotted your own experiences alongside some others that belong to the *Decameron*'s characters and author. One may furthermore set any other dataset upon this one and create new connections. It would be interesting, for example, to mark the position where Dante's house once stood or that of the Badia (only a few steps away) where Boccaccio presented his *Esposizioni*. Most anything is possible provided that the plotted locations remain verifiable.[4]

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[3] See Porta Casucci 194.

[4] Obviously, one may also make maps of imaginary spaces, though that is not our primary concern here.
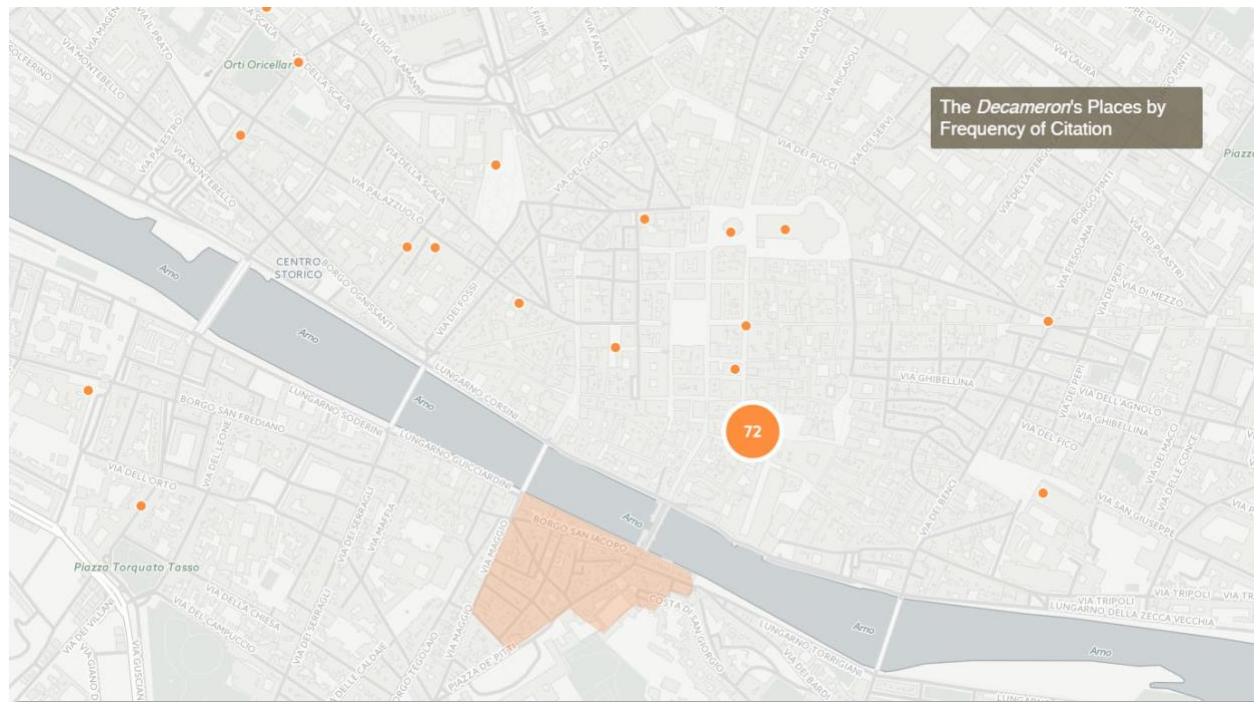
Figure 3

Much more could be said about this text in particular, but the present essay is intended above all to provide a broad overview of the benefits of geocriticism in the study of Boccaccio. In fact, now that we have used the adjective "verifiable" in relation to physical space, we must take a step back to consider certain limitations of that term before proceeding to our next experiment. Useful in this regard is an observation made by Betrand Westphal, currently one of the leading practitioners of geocriticism:

> In the Middle Ages […] the hierarchy of places that […] authorities competed to establish is unstable. It evolves in function of the place of each one and the others in the canon of the moment. The projection in the real or imaginary space is a good tributary way to measure the reception that is accorded to the texts and their authors. Time establishes the classics, and without doubt it is time that designated masterpieces. In any case, time activates the trends and enables openings. As for the cleavage between the real and the imaginary, it covers only a limited reach. The trip is often too mental for the reference to reality to be objective and for the places to be dependable. It is the text that ensures the link between the prestigious past and the irresolute present.[5]

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[5] Westphal *Plausible*, 19. In the original: "Au Moyen Âge […] La hiérarchie des lieux que ces autorités concourent à

établir est instable. Elle évolue en fonction de la place des uns et des autres dans le canon du moment. La projection

dans l'espace réel ou imaginaire est dans une bonne mesure tributaire de la réception que l'on accorde aux textes et à

leurs auteurs. Le temps fait son œuvre. Sans doute est-ce lui qui fait les chefs-d'œuvre. Il active en tout cas les modes et

The unstable medieval hierarchy of places was greatly dependent upon the exigencies of those who sought to establish it, just as the selection of such places was conditioned by an interpretive framework that created meaning from a canon, the most obvious of which included the bible itself and, secondarily, related geographical portions of texts such as Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos* and Isidore's *Etymologiae*. In other words, the primary geographical canon comprised locations that were important to an accurate understanding of the most culturally and spiritually important narrative of them all: Holy Scripture. Now, just as medieval thinkers regularly imagined a sort of anagogical Moebius strip that united the two parts of the Christian Bible into a single narrative despite obvious ontological discrepancies, medieval enthusiasts of geography tended to fuse locations together without much regard for temporal instability. Heraclitus' adage that you cannot step into the same river twice is just as true for any other geographical feature. Quite simply put, the Egypt of the Pharaohs is not the same as the Egypt into which Mary and Joseph fled when Herod began killing infants. Nevertheless, the mental trip to this "prestigious past" was as irresistible as it was essential. Moreover, it is not only the hierarchy of geography that is unstable; precisely because of the changes wrought by time, even the locations themselves are unstable entities. The idea that geographical locations were unstable may seem to us, who have Google maps in our phones and a GPS in our cars, to be a curious concept. Indeed, we have become so comfortable with cartography and coordinates that even looking at a map not presented with North toward its topmost edge (as on the emblem of the United Nations) can be mildly disorienting. Of course, these are all skills and conventions born from cartography, a science that was still in its infancy in the Middle Ages and accessible to a very small percentage of the population.[6] The fourteenth century was a time in which cartography comfortably comprised at least three main representational tools.[7] Symbolic *mappaemundi* based on the T-O type, portolan charts, and what we may describe as accuracy-driven maps coexisted (frequently indifferent to one another) throughout all of Boccaccio's lifetime. Each of these gave geospatial information within its own context and for a specific audience. Hence, returning to our previous example, Egypt's representation on each of these types of maps obviously varied.

The instability of geolocations across time and space is an especially productive notion for Boccaccio Studies for two principal reasons. First, as we have already noticed, he must necessarily have had only an approximate conception of those places where he had never been. Indeed, his

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ménage les ouvertures. Quant au clivage entre le réel et l'imaginaire, il ne recouvre qu'une portée limitée. Le voyage est trop souvent mental pour que la référence à la réalité objective des lieux soit fiable. C'est le texte qui assure le relais entre le passé prestigieux et un présent irrésolu" (*monde*, 51-52).

[6] Before we get too smug in the assessment of our modern capacity for understanding the meaning of maps, we should pause to consider some of the results of the National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study: 88% of young Americans then aged 18-24 were unable to locate Afghanistan on a map; 70% could not find North Korea; 50% could not find the state of New York; 38% consider speaking another language to be "not too important"; 21% say it is "not too important" to know where countries in the news are located.

[7] In order not to overburden this essay, we shall limit our bibliographical references related to late antiquity and the Middle Ages to a representative few. See Harley and Woodward, Lelewel, Almagià, Merrills.

generation had nothing but these disparate drawings and maps to help them visualize the landscapes that were so important to them. Second, he was intensely concerned not merely with contemporary geography but also – and perhaps especially – with locations that had been mentioned or described in ancient literature. This lack of fixedness could be assessed in both geographic and temporal terms. Mount Helicon, for example, was undeniably far away in Boeotia but its location as the home of the Muses was inaccessibly distant in the mythical past. Any voyage there was logically mental in nature. We can get an idea of what this meant by recalling the words of Cassiodorus to his monastic brothers:

> I also encourage you, not without good reason, to consider the information of the cosmographers, for you must definitely know each place mentioned in the holy books you read and in which part of the world it is located. This is something you will clearly manage to do if you read, carefully and without delay, the little book of Julius the Orator I left for you. In his four-part treatise, he speaks so fully of seas, islands, famous mountains, provinces, cities, rivers and peoples that his work contains almost all information pertaining to the study of cosmography. […] Then study Dionysius' map, which is easily comprehended, so that you may carefully observe with your own eyes what you had heard about with your ears in the aforementioned book. Then, should some bit of important information stir your mind, you have Ptolemy's codex, which so clearly shows each place that you would practically think he had lived in every region. Then, though you may remain in one place, as is appropriate for monks, you shall contemplate in your mind what others have acquired during laborious travels.[8]

These sage words of advice were penned in the sixth century, but the geo-literary experience they suggest is timeless. A devout soul in his cell who searches a map in eager anticipation to find Jerusalem and the River Jordan is quite comparable to a modern scholar who enthusiastically plots places mentioned in the *Decameron*. In both cases, maps aid in the discovery of elements that, as Moretti explained, would otherwise remain elusive.

Thus far, we have considered the benefits of using maps to reconstruct a literary reality, even one distorted by time, which existed hundreds of years ago. We are intrigued by a new window on the Middle Ages, just as the monks at Cassiodorus' Vivarium were fascinated by imagining the places mentioned in the Bible. Now we may usefully complicate this dynamic a bit by establishing a third

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[8] *Institutiones* 1.25.1-2: "Cosmographiae quoque notitiam vobis percurrendam esse non immerito suademus, ut loca singula, quae in libris sanctis legitis, in qua parte mundi sint posita evidenter cognoscere debeatis. quod vobis proveniet absolute, si libellum Iulii Oratoris, quem vobis reliqui, studiose legere festinetis; qui maria, insulas, montes famosos, provincias, civitates, flumina, gentes ita quadrifaria distinctione complexus est, ut paene nihil libro ipsi desit, quod ad cosmographiae notitiam cognoscitur pertinere. […] Deinde penacem Dionisii discite breviter comprehensum, ut quod auribus in supradicto libro percipitis, paene oculis intuentibus videre possitis. tum si vos notitiae nobilis cura flammaverit, habetis Ptolomei codicem, qui sic omnia loca evidenter expressit, ut eum cunctarum regionum paene incolam fuisse iudicetis, eoque fiat ut uno loco positi, sicut monachos decet, animo percurratis quod aliquorum peregrinatio plurimo labore collegit."

temporal reality. The peculiarly human fascination with distant times and places was also shared by Boccaccio himself, of course. In fact, readers of these pages already appreciate the vast importance of the ancient world and its geography to Boccaccio and his contemporaries. For this reason, it is superfluous to cite the normal examples.[9] Instead, I would like to call to your attention one of my favorite passages. After explaining Caesar's appearance in Dante's *Inferno*, Boccaccio writes:

> After Caesar's death, the escape of the conspirators, and the clearing of the judicial seats in the hall (which were called "rostra"), they prepared a pyre according to ancient custom and there burned Caesar's body with great reverence. His ashes were very diligently collected and placed within the bronze globe, which may still be seen atop the tall, pointed, quadrangular stone that is today located behind St Peter's Church in Rome. Commoners call this stone Aguglia, although its true name is Julia.[10]

Though much could be said in a geocritical vein about these lines, one quick "footnote" is enough. On the one hand, Boccaccio is reporting information he had read in Suetonius and one or more versions of the *Mirabilia*; on the other, he is telling us that he had actually seen this monument in person. The third temporal reality mentioned above comes into being with the realization that this "tall, pointed, quadrangular stone" is the obelisk that stands today in the spacious square in front of the "new" St. Peter's at the Vatican, the same one the reader may have seen in person or on television. The bronze globe is now lost, having been replaced by a cross, but the stone is the same. Similarly, its geographic coordinates have shifted a bit, yet the tangible reality is still extant. Even better than imagining Dante standing beneath the leaning Garisenda, at least to me, is imagining Boccaccio as he in turn imagined another time, now gone, at those same coordinates. Three temporal realities – Suetonius', Boccaccio's, and our own – are linked together in a single unstable geography: the placement of that one solemn obelisk. One may imagine a 3D-map or graph, not unlike the one below, where any single geographic point may be stretched upward or downward to represent the progression of time. You cannot step into the same Arno twice, but you can make a mental journey to other years in its existence. All this may come across as a bit mawkish, to tell the truth; nevertheless, it is a sensation enthusiastically shared by Boccaccio himself, not to mention Petrarch (whose yearning to live in a previous era was not simply rhetorical).

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[9] The bibliography pertaining specifically to Italian humanistic geography is not at all vast. Bouloux has done an excellent job of collecting bits and pieces into a helpful whole. See also Pastore Stocchi.

[10] The original reads: "Appresso, fuggitisi i congiurati ed egli essendo morto, disfatte le sedie giudiciali della corte, le quali si chiamano «rostri», gliene fu fatto, secondo l'antico costume, un rogo, e con grandissimo onore fu il corpo suo arso, e le ceneri, racolte diligentemente, furon messe in quel vaso ritondo di bronzo, il quale ancora si vede sopra quella pietra quadrangula aguta ed alta, che è oggi dietro alla chiesa di san Piero in Roma, la quale il vulgo chiama Aguglia, come che il suo vero nome sia Giulia" (*Esposizioni* 4.lit.200).
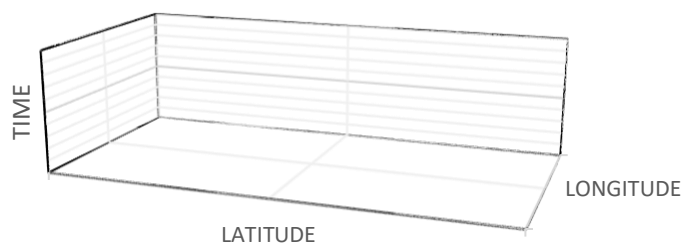
Not surprisingly, the use of maps can be helpful in imagining Boccaccio's own mental reconstructions, and especially helpful in understanding more fully how he uses them as backdrops for his own literary inventions. In fact, it is Boccaccio himself who explains why geography should interest us. "It is very rare that anyone [inspired by poetry] ever manages to compose noteworthy works if he does not possess the necessary tools for expressing the images he has dreamt up," he tells us. "Hence, he must know the principles of the liberal arts, ethics and science. He must also be aware of his ancestors' achievements and, indeed, mindful of the histories of nations, and their locations in the world, as well as those of seas, rivers and mountains."[11] There is no doubt that a knowledge of geography is important not only to understand the poets of the past, but also in order to become a good one in the present. Furthermore, we know that Boccaccio sincerely believed in this advice, inasmuch as his note to *Teseida* 1.40.7 shows that he himself had made use of a *carta da navicare* to understand how the Turkish Straits were arranged. About fifty years ago, Virginio Bertolini published a fascinating discovery related to Boccaccio's use of maps in the narration of Florio's fictional journey in the *Filocolo*, a work completed immediately before the *Teseida*. Bertolini's impressive philological work demonstrates very convincingly that our author had used a copy of Marino Sanudo's *Mapa de mari mediterraneo* to compose the following description of the maritime journey that Florio (under the assumed name Filocolo) made from Trapani to Alexandria:

> So Filocolo sailed off. Each day the winds reinvigorated Filocolo and blew him ever more forcefully onward, to the point that, after leaving Gozo and Malta behind, he found himself on the high seas and speeding away from land. On account of the slackening of the winds, and in order to arrive in Rhodes, he chose the route toward Alexandria. Having passed Schiza [Crava], Venetiko [Venedigo], Kithira [Cetri], Antikithira [Sechilo] and Pontikonisi [Pondico], he arrived at the ancient land of Minos, whence Saturn was chased away by his son. He stayed in Candia for a few days and then departed again. Shortly after passing Cape Sideros [Caposermon],

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[11] "[P]erraro inpulsus [*scil.* quidam poeta] commendabile perficit aliquid, si instrumenta, quibus meditate perfici consuevere, defecerint. […] Hinc et liberalium […] artium et moralium atque naturalium […] novisse principia necesse est; nec non et vidisse monimenta maiorum, ac etiam meminisse et hystorias nationum et regionum orbis, marium, fluviorum et montium dispositiones" (*Genealogie* 14.7.2-3).

Kasos [Casso] and Karpathos [Scarpanto], he reached Prasonisi [Trachilo] and from there went on to Lindos [Lendego].[12]

Sadly, there are only two extant witnesses of this map. However, one of them (Vat. lat. 2972) gave Bertolini just what he was hoping to find on c. 108r. Figure 4 presents a tiny portion of that *carta*, rotated 90° clockwise so that the island of Crete is more readily recognizable in the center of the image. (Fig. 5 shows the same information on a modern map.) The section of Florio's journey that corresponds to the passage above is marked with a solid orange line, a bit thicker than the thin straight rhumblines, that runs west to east across the map. Though not easy to see, these exotic place names (with a single exception) are all represented in perfect order and their variants are so slight that there can be little doubt that Bertolini had found something special. Without a map of this sort, Boccaccio – or anyone else who had never sailed there – would have had difficulty reconstructing Florio's fictional voyage across this timeless stretch of sea with any geographical accuracy. And precision was an indispensable part of that fiction.
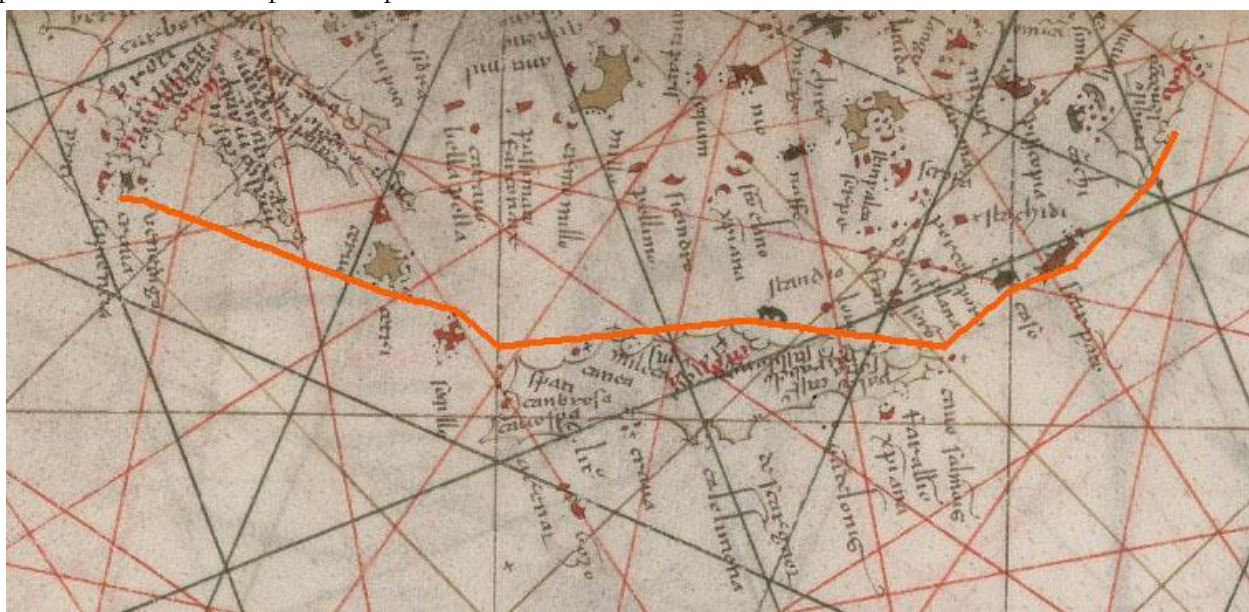

Figure 4

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[12] "Navica adunque Filocolo: e ciascun giorno più venti rinfrescano e pigliano forza in aiuto di Filocolo, sì che in brieve, lasciandosi dietro Gozo e Moata, piglia l'alto mare fuggendo la terra. Ma per mancamento di vento e per venire in Rodi, torse il cammino d'Alessandria, e passando Crava, Venedigo, Cetri, Sechilo e Pondico, trovò l'antica terra di Minòs, della quale Saturno fu dal figliuolo cacciato. Quivi alcun giorno dimorò in Candia, e quindi partito, Caposermon e Casso e Scarpanto trapassò in brieve e venne a Trachilo, e di quindi a Lendego" (*Filocolo* 4.78.1-2)
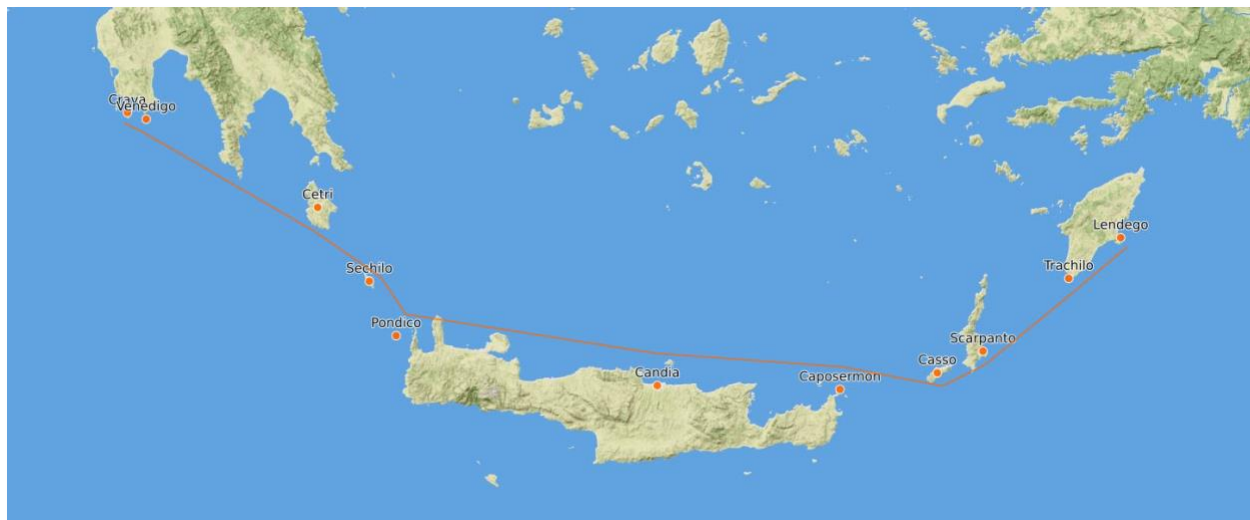
Figure 5

It is quite logical and likely, then, that Boccaccio continued to consult maps during the composition of the *Decameron*. Figure 6 shows another Mediterranean journey, this time the one made by Alatiel (2.7). Figure 7 is the same Aegean map Boccaccio used to create a realistic trip for Florio, this time with Alatiel's route traced upon it. Did he use Sanudo's *mapa* here as well? No one has suggested it until now, but it seems indeed quite likely. The proximity of Chios (where Constanzio was residing "in lasciva vita con una sua donna," 2.7.76) to Smyrna (where Osbech [a.k.a. Sultan Mohammed Öz Beg] happened to appear in the plot) creates a compelling geographical boundary between East and West. Not unlike Paris who crossed from Asia Minor to the Peloponnesus and returned with Helen, Osbech leaves Smyrna for Chios and returns home with the similarly irresistible Alatiel. In fact, the Aegean was once a sort of magical geographical space, one that Ulysses and Aeneas both crossed as they sailed away from Asia Minor, which Petrarch describes in his *Itinerarium* as "once the most pleasant of provinces, filled with Greek farmers after the fall of Troy, and now the fierce territory of the Turks, enemies of truth."[13] Time had negatively changed the complexion of the spaces according to Boccaccio as well. In the *De montibus*' entry dedicated to this area of the world, he writes: "The Aegean Sea was once just as full of kingdoms, famous men and wonderful things as it was of islands, but nowadays it languishes under the vile scourge of servitude."[14] He evidently felt very strongly here (as in almost all his works, honestly) that the Venetians had spread corruption, exploitation and decay, that the heyday of ancient Greece was irrecoverably lost to the past. Setting the action of any story in this region (cf. also *Dec.* 4.3) adds the patina of an imagined past's former glory to an otherwise sad, modern shabbiness. And viceversa.

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[13] "Olim provinciarum mitissima, post Troie ruinam Grecis referta cultoribus, nunc Turcorum veri hostium ferox regio" (Petrarca *Itinerario*, 72).

[14] "Egeum mare insularum eque et regnorum atque virorum illustrium et mirandarum rerum plenum fuit, hodie torpet vero turpi servitio obnoxium."
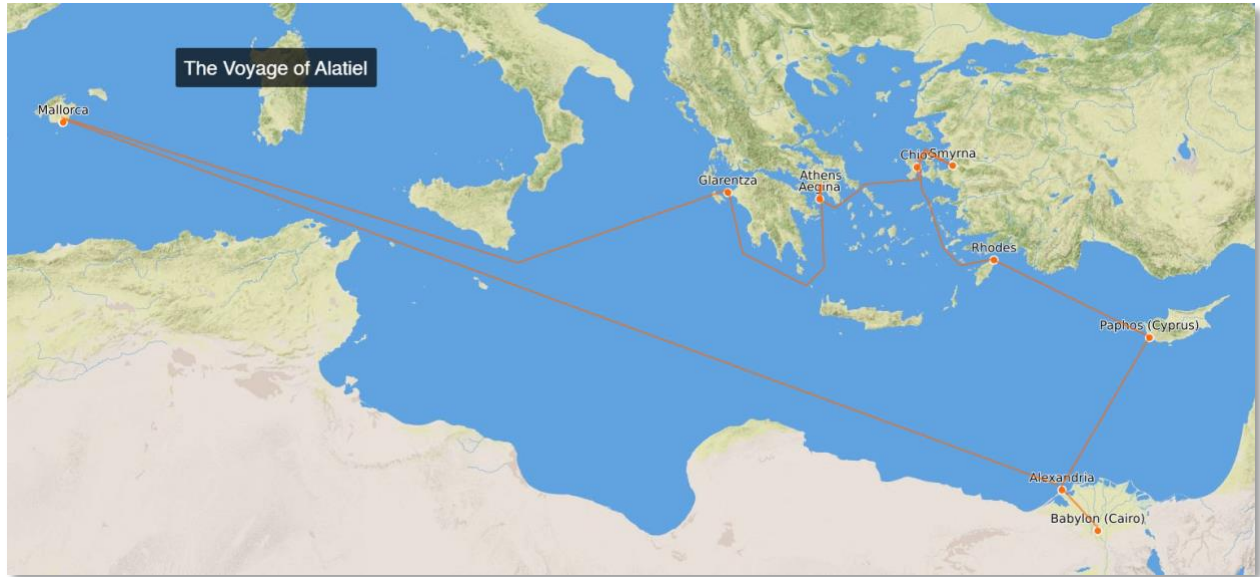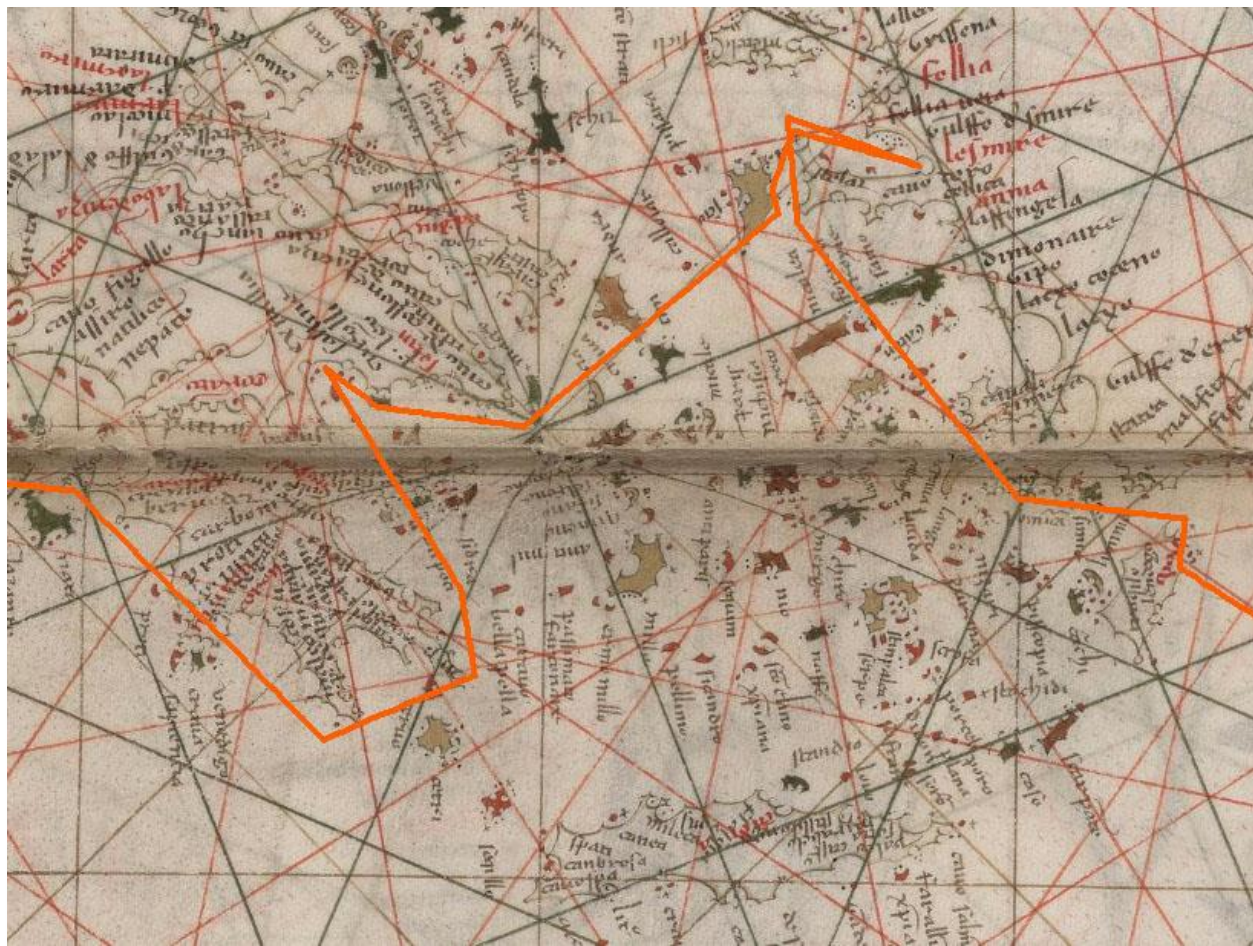
Figure 6

Figure 7

Having looked at maps in reference to the *Filocolo* and the *Decameron*, anyone who is familiar with Boccaccio's Latin works is by now expecting further considereation of his *De montibus* as well, and for very good reason.[15] It contains an impressive wealth of geographical information, gleaned from the texts Boccaccio knew earlier in his life, together with discoveries made in works that he was able to consult only much later, most importantly Pomponius Mela's *Chorographia*.[16] Although scholars

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[15] The bibliography of the *De montibus* is slight. The studies of greatest interest are Pastore Stocchi, Bouloux, Greppi and Cachey, but much work remains to be done.

[16] The importance of Pliny to the *De montibus* is extraordinary. Although scholars once thought that Petrarch had provided Boccaccio's principal copy of the *Naturalis historia* in the form of Par. Lat. 6802 (e.g, Pastore Stocchi, Martellotti, Zaccaria), which Boccaccio had consulted (see Fiorilla 41-64), more recent studies have demonstrated that he used a different witness for the passages transcribed in the *Zibaldone Magliabechiano* (Perucchi, Petoletti, Reeve). Pastore

have expressed varying opinions about the work, it seems that everyone is in agreement that much more needs to be done. Organized like a geographical dictionary, the entries are arranged by type: first mountains, then forests, springs, lakes, rivers, marshes, and finally seas. Each headword was probably prepared first on a strip of paper and then incorporated into the proper section and in alphabetical order.[17] In a very real sense, the geographical data he collected were treated already as discrete units that could be arranged, compared and contrasted with others. This configuration seems to be calling out for GIS. As the work stands now, it is rather unwieldy and difficult to study. There are two other unfortunate facts: there is no extant autograph copy and currently no reliable critical edition of the work. Since Pastore Stocchi's 1998 edition, scholars have had the advantage of a readily accessible text, but with the disadvantage of an edition prepared, as he admits, "con criteri indubbiamente eclettici."[18] We have turned to philology because it, too, is a fundamental part of geocriticism, at least with regard to medieval studies. Up to now preference has been given to how geospatial approaches can open doors in literary studies; the reverse is of course just as true. Philology enabled Bertolini to announce the discovery of Boccaccio's use of Sanudo's cartographic skills in his literary recreation of the seascape of ancient Greece that we saw in the flights of Florio and Alatiel toward the east. With a sounder critical edition of Boccaccio's geographical dictionary, it will soon be possible to identify other maps with which he was familiar.

    The remainder of this essay will deal with an experiment of this sort. In 2012, Francesco Rubat Borel published a brief paper in which he notes lexical similarities between the Peutinger Table and names in the entry related to the Po River in the *De montibus*. He states:

> The fact that Boccaccio refers to *Naburni* and *Nantuani* immediately leads one to surmise that he knew a document analogous to the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, whether a map, an itinerary or a geographic treatise that, though now lost, was extremely similar. There's more: the reading *Nantuani*, which is to my knowledge a hapax, for the common *Nantuates* suggests a common source.[19]

He goes on to suggest the possibility that the Peutinger Table (or one of its close relatives) could have been the one Petrarch sent to Boccaccio in the summer of 1357 with a letter in which the former wrote: "Alongside these [the volumes of the *Invective contra medicum*], I am sending you this book, frayed from a long life and the worse for wear and tear, and also the ancient map of mine that

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Stocchi's theory that this same manuscript had nonetheless been used in the redaction of the later *De montibus* (1963, 64-72) remains to be verified. Albert Lloret and I are not of the opinion that this is the case.

[17] Cf. Blair 96-99, 210-13 *et passim.*

[18] In Boccaccio 1998, 2034.

[19] "Il fatto che Boccaccio citi i *Naburni* e i *Nantuani* induce subito a supporre che conoscesse un documento analogo alla *Tabula Peutingeriana*, fosse una carta o un itinerario o un trattato geografico oggi perduto fortemente affine a quella. C'è di più: la lezione *Nantuani*, che a me consta essere un *hapax*, invece del comune *Nantuates*, fa propendere per una fonte comune" (Rubat Borel 81).

you asked for."[20] We know that Petrarch had a collection of old maps,[21] but it is impossible to say with any level of certainty if this was one of them. In fact, and especially in the wake of recent proof that Petrarch's Pliny was not the source of the excerpts in the *Zibaldone Magliabechiano*, it seems imprudent to assume that everything of particular interest on Boccaccio's desk had somehow been provided by the older poet.

At any rate, we may set aside the question of where Boccaccio had found a Peutingerian map and examine Rubat Borel's claim more closely. For this, we need a few more images: Figure 8 provides a map of the northern Apennines flanked by those cities Boccaccio mentions in the first part of his description of the range; Figure 9 shows the same area with an overlay of the roads and towns mentioned in the Peutinger Table,[22] in such a way that one may more easily make sense of Figures 10 and 11.[23] In essence, Rubat Borel noticed that the Peutinger Table locates the source of the Po (the dark squiggle labeled Padus) between two populations: the Nantuani and the Naburni (Fig. 10). Upon reading in the *De montibus* that the Po "begins at the very base of Monte Viso, establishing its initial course between the Nantuani and the Naburni,"[24] it then occurred to him that this map could have been Boccaccio's source. While Naburni is apparently a hapax related to the Peutingerian tradition, that single observation is perhaps insufficient to support the idea that Boccaccio knew a version of the 11-section parchment scroll (roughly one foot tall and twenty-two feet in length) that now exists in a single surviving witness.[25] More evidence is required.

Let's now turn to another section of the *De montibus*, this time the entry dedicated to the Apennines:

> Indeed, some say that it begins, like the Alps, at the promontory of Monaco near edge of the Ligurian Sea and tends roughly northward together with the Alps, passing the Bagienni [Bagitennos] on its right. When it reaches the Nantuates

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[20] "Cum quibus et librum istum senio victum, et canum morsibus lacerum, simul et vetustissimam meam quam postulas cartam mitto" (Petrarca *Opera*, 1199). The timeworn book mentioned here is the one Pastore Stocchi thought could be ms. Par. Lat. 6802. Rubat Borel suggests interesting conjectures, based on the work of Guatier Dalché, about the provenance and the eventual fate of this Peutingerian map.

[21] See Petrarca *postille*, 329-30.

[22] Fig. 9 was provided by René Voorburg's online project *OmnesViae: Roman Routeplanner* (omnesviae.org).

[23] Images of the Peutinger Table were taken from the dynamic viewer (http://peutinger.atlantides.org/map-a/) published online as ancillary material to Talbert. Note that Fig. 10 belongs to the left of Fig. 11 and that when put together word Liguri should then be legible.

[24] "Alii dicunt quod in infimis radicibus Vesuli oriatur et inter Naburnos et Nantuanos arripiat primo cursum." Despite the fact that the reading is identical in this case to Pastore Stocchi's (in Boccaccio *De montibus*, 1961), all quotations of the *De montibus* are taken from the as yet unpublished edition being prepared by Albert Lloret and myself.

[25] Conventional wisdom holds that the Peutinger Table is an early thirteenth-century copy of an original from Late Antiquity, but Emily Albu has convincingly argued that the original was instead a Carolingian display map.

[Nantuanos] of Gaul, it bends eastward, leaving them to its left and the Sengauni to
its right in the environs of Albintimilium, Albigaunum, Genoa and the Veleiates
[Veliates] of Gaul, while on its other side are the Cisalpine Gauls and Augusta
Taurinorum.[26]

This description is really very remarkable. If one compares it to the section of the Table represented in Figure 10, it begins to seem more like a verbal sketch of this map than a portrayal of Cisalpine geography. The course of the Alps (represented by a faint, irregular undulating line that runs from the bottom left of Fig. 10 diagonally upwards to a lake in the top-right corner) is intersected by that of the Apennines which breaks off from it and runs between the "Nantuani" and the "Bagitenni," precisely as Boccaccio relates. It is this second line that he is following. The line of the Apennines continues into Figure 11 where it runs more or less horizontally from left to right, dividing the image into two halves: a top (to the left of the mountain range) and a bottom (to its right). The range passes the "Senguani" (written on the map in black ink) and the "Veliate" (in red) to its right; to its left is Augusta Taurinorum. There is no additional hapax here, unfortunately, but the spelling "Bagitenni" is certainly not the most usual form (Arnaldi et al. 252-53). More interesting still is the next section of the Apennines' description (much of which is visible in Fig. 12):

From there, it bends southeastward toward the Tyrrhenian Sea, the city of Luna,
Lucca, Pisa, Pistoia and the most noble Tuscan city of Florence to its south. To its
north it passes the Po river, Parma, Vergil's Mantua, Reggio Emilia, Modena and the
university town of Bologna. Moving from that point onward, it passes Arezzo,
Cortona, lake Trasimeno, Perugia, Foligno, Spoleto, Bevagna, Todi, Bolsena, Civita
Castellana, Narni and Rome, the city that was once the master of the world. To its
left, it passes Cornelii Forum, which we also call Imola, Faenza, Forlì and
Forlimpopoli, then Curva Cesena, Rimini, Pesaro, Fano and Senigallia.[27]

Instead of ancient indigenous peoples, cities now represent the boundaries of the Apennines. The description is made in two sections. In the first, Boccaccio names several cities along the old Via

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[26] "Hic autem secundum quosdam a promontorio Monichi circa finem Ligustini maris incipit, unde et Alpes, et in

aquilonem fere tendens una cum Alpibus a dextris linquit Bagitennos, et cum ad Nantuanos Gallos devenit in orientem

flectitur eis a sinistris derelictis et Sengaunis a dextris, ubi Albintimilium et Albingaunum et Ianuam et Veliates Galli,

cum ex parte alia habeat Cispadanos et Augustam Taurinorum."

[27] "Et inde in euroaustrum vergens Tyrrhenum mare, Lunam civitatem, Lucam, Pisas, Pistorium et nobilissimam Tuscie

civitatem Florentiam ad meridiem sinit. Ad aquilonem autem Padum fluvium, Parmam, Mantuam Virgilii, Regium

Lepidum, Mutinam et studiorum matrem Bononiam. Hinc a dextris ad ulteriora procedens Aretium, Cortonam,

Trasimenum lacum, Perusium, Fulgineum, Spolitium, Mevaniam, Tudertum, Vulsinas, Faleros, Narnias et olim rerum

dominam urbem Romam conspicit. A leva autem Cornelii Forum, quod et Ymolam dicimus, Faventiam et Ravennam

Sabinorum coloniam, Forum Livii et Popilii, inde Curvam Cesenam, Ariminum, Pensaurum, Fortune Fanum et

Senogalliam."

Cassia from Luna to Florence, then more on the other side of the range along the old Via Aemilia from Parma to Bologna. In the second, he follows the same pattern: first naming the towns on the remainder of the Via Cassia from north to south, then the rest of the Via Aemilia to Rimini and along the Via Flaminia and the coast as far as Ancona. Insofar as these ancient roads skirt the foothills on either side of the Apennines, not much of unique solid evidence can be found here. Not much, that is, except the name Curva Cesena, which like Naburni has long been associated with the Peutinger Table (Fig. 13).[28] Almost all of the *De montibus*' extant witnesses carry this reading, including every one of those that can be considered most reliable.[29] It seems that there is genuine proof that Rubat Borel was correct. This discovery will open the door to new studies of Boccaccio's use of the Peutinger tradition and to new investigations of the Table's own history.

In the preceding pages, an attempt has been made, however modest, to suggest that intelligent maps based on thoughtful criteria can lead to new areas of research, or at the very least can provide geospatial paratexts that will be useful to research that is already in full swing. I would certainly stop short of proposing that they could add "new lustre to a tired field," as Moretti's publicist claimed, but it is not at all difficult to imagine literary mapping as an activity that can assist in opening unprecedented windows on Boccaccio's world.
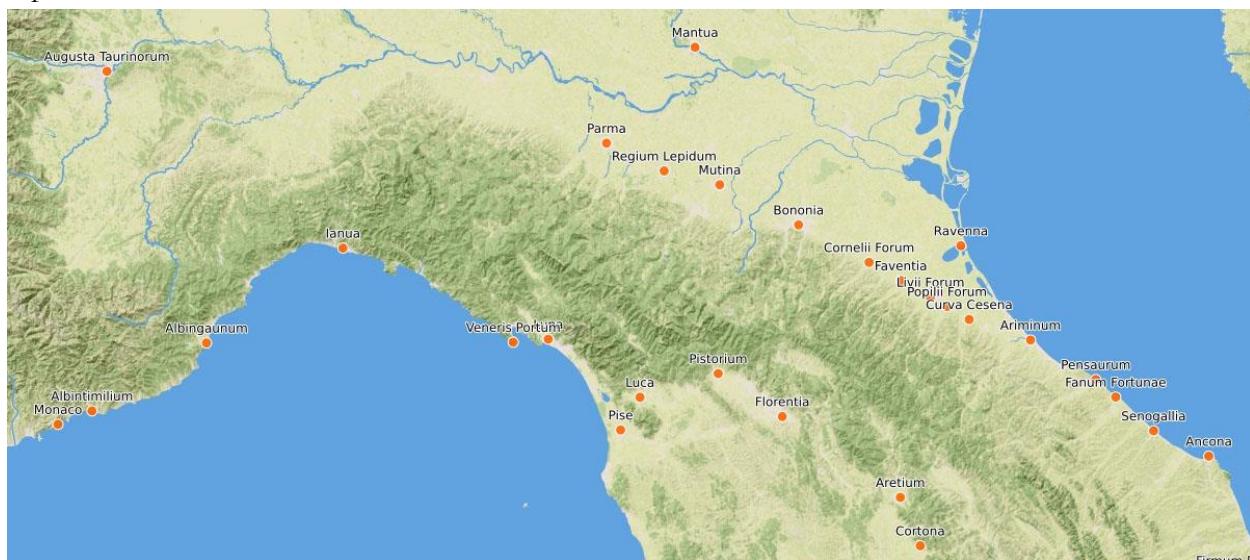

Figure 8

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28 See Solari, Santoro Bianchi and Talbert 160.

29 Not recognizing the name Curva, Pastore Stocchi emended it to Cervia, which – though geographically sensible – is present only in the generally untrustworthy ms. 5316 of the Biblioteca Casanatense.
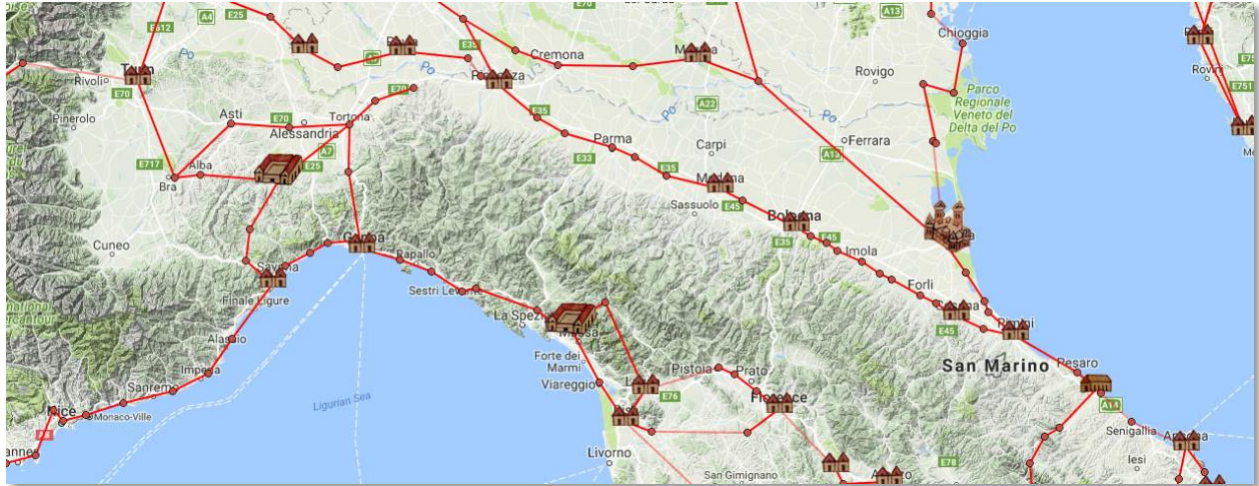
Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

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