

Giovanni Regina: A Theologian at the Court of King Robert in Naples During Boccaccio's Time.¹

Between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries a new genre of disputation was established in Paris, first in the juridical sphere, then extending into the fields of the arts, medicine and theology. It was the genre of *quodlibeta*, which should not be viewed as mere scholastic exercise, as the title seems to suggest, but became instead the field for refined philosophical and theological debate.² The new opportunity for theological debate *de quolibet* ("about anything"), pointed toward a quite specific goal: to establish that Parisian theologians were able to discuss all fields of knowledge, casting themselves as a leading social group, a beacon of medieval society.³ This implicit claim to cultural supremacy led to a confrontation with Parisian jurists when the theologians went beyond mere speculation and moved to practical ground, trying to impose rules and regulations for society. As proved harbingers of a higher truth, so the argument went, the indications for a Christian society that theologians advanced were also supposed to be more perfect. All instruments — including juridical ones — were thus legitimately within their reach in the organization of society according to Christian principles.⁴

The power struggle between the two cultural university elites took place against the historical backdrop of the climactic clash between the two great powers of the medieval world: the papacy and the empire, which theologians and jurists almost came to epitomize. The Dominican Henry of Lubeca clarified in 1323 the hierarchy of the subjects discussed in *quodlibeta*: from matter in motion to pure, unmoving form; from a lesser to a more noble

¹ What I am presenting here is the result of the first year of my work: the transcription of the first two *Quodlibeta* of Giovanni Regina, which I completed with the support of Università Salesiana di Roma, Università di Bari, Université Paris-Sorbonne and Princeton University.

² Jacquart 1985; Glorieaux 1925.

³ Marmusztejn 2007.

⁴ Wei 1993.

subject; from natural philosophy to medicine, astronomy, metaphysics and finally theology.

Among the several theologians who devoted themselves to *quodlibeta*, my focus is on Giovanni Regina of Naples OP.⁵ His work is truly impressive: thirteen *quodlibeta*, together containing more than 300 questions. The importance of such production is beyond question, but its sheer size is imposing. Perhaps it is for this reason that it has never been published in a critical edition. In 1973, my mentor and friend, Prospero Tommaso Stella, began working on the edition of the whole *corpus*, collating eight witnesses before his death in 2011.⁶

But how much is there of interest in the monumental work of a Dominican theologian for students and scholars of Boccaccio⁷? Some, and perhaps even a great deal. The first element that we should take into account is the time spent in Naples by the two Giovanni (Regina and Boccaccio), especially in connection with Robert of Anjou, king of Naples, who dwelled in Avignon for five years in total symbiosis with John XXII and whose political vision he embraced.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO	GIOVANNI REGINA	ROBERT OF ANJOU
1313 born in Certaldo	1305 <i>Sententiarius</i> in Paris	1310 in Romagna
	1315 <i>licentia</i> in Paris	1315 in Montecatini
	1317 General Chapter in Lyon. <i>Lector</i> in Naples' Studium	
	1319–24 Avignon	1319–24 Avignon
	1325 Naples	1325 Naples
1327 Naples	Naples	Naples
1341 leaves Naples	1346 Naples	1343 Naples

What emerges from the table above is that all three were in Naples for many years, starting in 1327 and until 1341, when Boccaccio leaves the city for Florence. Furthermore, and just as importantly, the theologian and the

⁵ Biller 1997; Käppeli 1940; Nold, 2012.

⁶ Stella 1961, 1973, 1975 and 2002.

⁷ Chiappelli 1988; Battaglia Ricci 2003.

king were in Avignon at the same time. Giovanni Regina was made *lector* in Naples in 1317. We also know that between 1319 and 1323 Pope John XXII consulted the Dominican multiple times on theological and philosophical matters, including the canonization process of Thomas Aquinas.⁸ Giovanni Regina, together with Guido Terreni and Pietro de la Palude, who were also very close to John XXII, formed the group of the so-called “infallibilists,” staunch supporters of the pope’s infallibility.⁹ During these years, the interaction with the court of King Robert was decisive. Giovanni was elected *magister* in Naples’ Dominican Studium in 1324, where he relocated in 1325.

During these years, a young Boccaccio also lived in the Angevin capital, where he studied canon law, as attested by several sources.¹⁰ And in those same years (1330–31 and perhaps 1332 too), Cino da Pistoia also lived in Naples, where he taught civil law.¹¹ While there is no direct evidence that Boccaccio knew Giovanni Regina, the latter was a supporter of the king who lived in the royal palace, a debater of *quodlibetal* questions in public, and a leading figure in the king’s retinue, so it is not at all unlikely that the young Boccaccio might have known about the theologian and his work.

What is more, Boccaccio pursued a canon law degree in Naples in the very same years in which Cino and Giovanni Regina taught civil law and theology there.¹² The Dominican held at least three speeches *ad magistrandum*, before the king and the assembly of students and masters: two for two medicine students and one *ad magistrandum in iure civili*. The crucial role that his canon law studies played in the eventual profile of Boccaccio as a writer has begun to emerge in scholarly discourse (e.g., Grace Del Molino’s recent investigations on the legal framework of several novellas in the *Decameron*), but the seriousness of his preparation had already been acknowledged by his contemporaries, if Mainardo Cavalcanti “capitanus generalis ad guerram” (1358–59), and the bishop of Florence employed him several times as a canonist ambassador to the papal curia. Boccaccio visited the court of emperor Ludwig of Bavaria as Florence’s ambassador in 1351 and was named ambassador to Lombardy in 1359, perhaps at the court of

⁸ Käppeli 1940.

⁹ Turley 1975.

¹⁰ E.g., Alfano 2014, *passim*; Sabatini 1975; Brown 1991.

¹¹ Chiappelli 1999.

¹² Torraca 1914.

Bernabò Visconti, before traveling to the papal court of Urban V in Avignon.¹³

Interactions among students, professors and lecturers were frequent, especially among people interested in similar subjects such as canon and civil law, but also between law and medicine or theology, since theology, in Naples as in Paris, vied with the other faculties for cultural primacy.¹⁴ For example, Boccaccio remembers the king's physician and botanist, Matteo Silvatico from Salerno, who possibly taught medicine in the Neapolitan Studium and appears in *Decameron* 4.10 with the moniker of Mazzeo della Montagna "grandissimo medico in chirurgia" ("a great physician and surgeon"). He also mentions Paolo da Perugia, "magister et custos bibliothecae Roberti" (*Genealogie* 15.6), and the Augustinian theologian and astrologist Dionigi Roberti from Borgo Sansepolcro, magister at Sorbonne from 1324, who also lived in Naples beginning in 1337 and whose perhaps greatest claim to fame is the role he had as spiritual mentor for Petrarch in Avignon and addressee of three of his letters.

Boccaccio embraces Cino's polemic against the intellectual aridity of canonists and legists, who nonetheless enjoyed the king's favor.¹⁵ We see this in both the *De casibus* (3.10) and the *Genealogie* (14.4) when he attacks fastidiousness and vanity, recasting the view expressed in "Deh! Quando rivedrò il dolce paese," that Cino wrote probably in Naples (and against Naples): "gente senza alcuna cortesia, / la cu' 'nvidia punge / l'altrui valor" (Marti 1969, 867). Even in praising the king, Boccaccio sounds like the most cautious among the supporters of Robert of Anjou, whom Petrarch had celebrated as "wise, kind, high-minded and gentle, he was the king of kings,"¹⁶ a title that Boccaccio also grants King Robert as a "new Salomon."¹⁷ Within this cultural and political landscape, keeping in mind the presence and the role of Giovanni Regina may help us see the interconnections among intellectuals as based on, and often consisting of, personal exchanges rather than the mere circulation of texts.

The existence of the Dominican Studium in Naples is attested from 1269. The University of Naples just like many other Italian universities, did not

¹³ Cf. Sapegno 1968 and Miglio 1979.

¹⁴ Biller and Minnis 1997; Ziegler 1999; Jacquot 2011

¹⁵ Kiesewetter 1998 and 2004.

¹⁶ *Familiars* 12.2.35.

¹⁷ Kelly 2003.

have a school of Theology, a subject that was instead taught by the mendicant orders: Augustinians, Predicators and Franciscans.¹⁸ In 1272 the Dominican Studium welcomed Thomas Aquinas, upon recommendation of Charles I of Anjou, who subsidized the monastery, seat of the Studium, with 12 ounces of gold, thus beginning a close connection with the Dominican Order. However short-lived (Aquinas died in 1274), the presence of the Doctor Angelicus made that environment a veritable seedbed of Thomistic studies. Among the many scholars who worked there were Tolomeo da Lucca, Reginaldo da Piperno, the jurist Bartolomeo da Capua and our Giovanni Regina da Napoli. The connection between Dominicans and Angevins became ever stronger, as we can see in Charles II's commissioning in 1307 of a Latin translation of Arabic works to the friars Niccolò da Adria and Guido da Cipro. The Studium at San Domenico became the regular burial place of all Angevin monarchs, a mausoleum of the royal family, a sort of Dominican equivalent of the Franciscan Monastery of Santa Chiara.¹⁹

Several *studia* of theology run by the religious orders flourished during the time of Boccaccio's youth in Naples, the golden age of King Robert.²⁰ However, their activity should be observed in relation to the political vicissitudes of those years. The capital of the Guelf Angevin kingdom, if we may call it so, was one of the epicenters of the politico-religious conflicts of the Trecento and the presence of such theologians as Giovanni Regina, while certainly motivated by his teaching position at the Studium, was also welcomed by both the king and the pope who aimed at strengthening their positions in that ideological and political setting.²¹

Just as the Parisian theologians, the Neapolitan too — and especially Giovanni Regina — claimed to be universal experts who possessed knowledge in all university fields, in line with Robert's title of *rex expertus in omni scientia* (a king expert in every discipline) found in the Malines Bible, produced in Naples.

What are the inquiries in the *Quaestiones*? Can they help us study Boccaccio's works?²² If we continue the investigation we have carried out so far (while keeping in mind that the goal of these *quodlibeta* is to uncover the theologians' attempts at prevailing over other intellectuals), it should not come as a surprise that the majority of *quaestiones* have a theological or

¹⁸ Vitolo and Di Meglio 2003; de Stefano 1560.

¹⁹ Caggese 1930; Vitolo 2008; Bertaux 1898.

²⁰ Monti 1924.

²¹ Boyer 1998.

²² Sherberg 2011.

doctrinal subject. One asks whether Christ had two births,²³ another whether the most external *orbis* is also the noblest,²⁴ whether the furthest sphere of heaven moves *localiter*,²⁵ whether angels can be damned²⁶ and demons repent,²⁷ whether Paulus of Tarsus could have died before the conversion and much more.²⁸ After these, a series of more contingent *quaestiones* appear, with definitely more direct consequences on the society, thoughts and behaviors of the time. In some cases, such *quaestiones* are even based on real life experience, from governmental system to family relations, from interreligious connections to inheritance. *Quaestio* 19 of *Quodlibet* I asks whether a woman's testament must declare the illegitimacy of illegitimate children,²⁹ which raises juridical questions of no small importance about inheritance rights. In late medieval and Renaissance Tuscany, illegitimate children were very common.³⁰ Indeed, the most famous illegitimate child of the *Decameron* is Giovanni Boccaccio himself, son of a wealthy Florentine merchant, Boccaccino di Chellino. We nowadays imagine illegitimacy as simple: if the parents are married the children are legitimate, if not, no. During the early Trecento, it was more complicated: we can find different categories of illegitimate children. A *manzer* was a child born to a prostitute or to an incestuous union. A *nothus*, a child of a married woman due to an adulterous affair. There was a *spurius*, a child of a couple who could not have been legally married, such as a citizen and a non-citizen, or a married man and a concubine. And lastly, a *naturalis*, the offspring of a couple who could have married and indeed might do so in the future. (This last category was treated fairly indulgently.) Children raised by benevolent fathers were sometimes granted legitimation but always remained "legitimated" rather than "legitimate." As one can imagine, these degrees inspired a huge variety of juridical cases. Boccaccio introduces one such 'case' in the *Decameron's* tale of Ferondo's putative son, whose legal status is at stake. Perhaps not coincidentally, the novella unfolds along the intersection not

²³ Qdl. 2, Quaestio 4: "Utrum Christo sit attribuenda duplex nativitas?"

²⁴ Qdl. 2, Q. 8: "Utrum superior orbis sit nobilior?"

²⁵ Qdl. 2, Q. 9: "Utrum ultima sphaera moveatur localiter?"

²⁶ Qdl. 1, Q. 3: "Utrum angelus potuerit damnari?"

²⁷ Qdl. 2, Q. 7: "Utrum daemones possint paenitere?"

²⁸ Qdl. 1, Q. 12: "Utrum beatus Paulus potuerit mori ante conversionem?"

²⁹ Qdl. 1, Q. 19: "Utrum mulier debeat revelare viro suo filium ex ea illegitime natum?"

³⁰ Kuhen 2002.

only of (imaginary) life and death, but also of the secular world of the “ricchissimo villano” and that of the (apparently) “giusto e santo,” yet really casuistic, abbot.³¹

Quaestio 20 asks which the best form of governance is, by election or succession.³² Since the Anjou had asked the pope to halt the imperial crowning ceremonies, questions such as this clearly prove the political meaning of these *quodlibeta*. The *Decameron*'s storytelling structure is notably based on the result of just this kind of power negotiation among the storytellers. Each Day's King or Queen is appointed by the outgoing 'regent,' not elected by the community of the speakers. This was the podestà model, widespread in the Italian Communes during the crisis of the fourteenth century. Similarly political is *Quaestio 20*, which asks whether a vow or an oath is more binding.³³ In the tale of Meuccio and Tingoccio we find a sort of spoof on theological quibbling, on the scholastic mania for degrees and distinctions. Giovanni Regina's second volume of *quodlibeta* contains more interesting questions: is it a vice or a virtue to patiently suffer an offense (*Quaestio 20*)? The simple formulation of the question is transparently relevant, I believe, for framing the debate, at once heated and comical, that is elicited by Dioneo's telling and then glossing of the story of patient Griselda at the end of the *Decameron*.³⁴ And is it a greater sin to take away a man's honor or his money (*Quaestio 21*)? This is a puzzle that connects issues of wealth and prestige that haunt the potentially conflictual relation between the mercantile world of many novellas, with its ethics and practices, and the world of the court, with its own rituals and ideals, as in the existential and social parables of Federigo degli Alberighi or Nastagio degli Onesti (*Dec.* 5.8 and 5.9).³⁵ *Quaestio 22* asks whether the executor of a will commits a capital sin when he does not follow the deceased's instructions carefully.³⁶ Issues of will and post-mortem identity are at the core of the first story of the *Decameron*, which opens with the perversion of one's own narrative self by a notary who delighted in legal falsehoods (“egli, essendo notaio, avea gran-

³¹ See, for instance, the mockery of scholastic reasoning in 3.8.25.

³² Qdl. 1, Q. 20: “Utrum melior sit habere regem per successionem, quam per electionem vel e contrario?”

³³ Qdl. 1, Q. 21: “Utrum obligatio iuramenti sit maior quam obligatio voti vel e contrario?”

³⁴ Qdl. 2, Q. 20: “Utrum sustinere iniuriam illatam patienter, sit virtuosum vel vitiosum?”

³⁵ Qdl. 2, Q. 21: “Utrum maius peccatum sit privare hominem honore sibi debito quam pecunia sibi debita vel data, vel e contrario?”

³⁶ Qdl. 2, Q. 22: “Utrum exsecutores testamentorum peccent mortaliter non statim exequendo?”

dissima vergogna quando uno de' suoi strumenti, come che pochi ne facesse, fosse altro che falso trovato," 1.1.10). In *Quaestio* 19 of *Quodlibet* II, again for example, Giovanni wonders about the post-mortem destiny of a father who caught his daughter cheating on her husband.³⁷ If the father kills the adulterous pair, will he be damned to hell or not?³⁸ We might also wonder the same when, in the fifth canto of Dante's *Inferno*, we evaluate Francesca's words, as she foretells an eternity of punishment in Caina for the soul of her husband and murderer. Similar issues are, at least potentially, relevant when we read the oppositional tales of Ghismonda and Tancredi (*Dec.* 4.1) next to Caterina and Lizio da Valbona (*Dec.* 5.4).³⁹ For Tancredi, we may notice, deliberation about the case is immediate and he is unwavering in his determination, at least for what concerns the fate of the lover ("io ho già meco preso partito che farne," 4.1.28), with concerns being expressed solely about the future of his daughter. In *Dec.* 5.4 when young Ricciardo begs for his life before Lizio, his lover's father, and confesses to his own sins ("Io conosco, sì come disleale e malvagio uomo, aver *meritata* morte, e per ciò fate di me quello che più vi piace" ("I admit that my disloyalty and delinquency have merited death, so deal with me even as it may seem best to you," 5.4.42, emphasis added), the situation is similar, inasmuch as we again encounter the idea of death as the automatic outcome of sexual transgression. While the two fathers differ in their assessment of what the proper course of action is — a gory but honorable vendetta or a matrimonial and patrimonial happy-ending —, they share a very concrete sense of ethics and seem not to consider theological questions before taking action. Students of Giovanni Regina, imagining themselves in either of the *Decameron's* situations, would know better than to jump to conclusions.

I am not arguing for a direct relationship between the various theological or legal cases and subjects Giovanni Regina addressed in his *Quodlibeta* on the one hand and the narrative 'cases' and subjects of the *Decameron* on the other. I propose, in other words, Giovanni Regina's relevance to the

³⁷ Qdl. 2, Q. 19: "Utrum puniatur a Deo seu peccet ille qui occidit filiam in adulterium deprehensam et adulterum?"

³⁸ Here is the ambiguous ending of the *quaestio*: "Et sic videtur, salva ut dixi meliori sententia, talis immunis esse a peccato; supposito tamen semper quod hoc faciat ex zelo iustitiae. Simpliciter tamen melius faceret, propter dubium quod posset esse quo zelo hoc faceret, quod a tali occisione abstineret. Et hoc unicuique consulendum esset tamquam melius et magis tutum, quamvis, ut supra probatum est, talis occidendo non peccaret. Ad argumentum factum in contrarium dicendum quod, quia aliud est tribunal Dei et hominis, multa peccata non puniuntur ab homine iudice, quae tamen puniuntur a Deo, ut supra declaratum est. Iste tamen occidendo non videtur peccare, ut supra probatum est."

³⁹ Korneeva 2012.

Decameron, not as an exercise in intertextuality but as a comparison of contemporary values and ways of thinking. Several of these *Quaestiones* seem to evoke scenarios that would befit a Boccaccian novella, with a twisted plot and an unexpected finale. Giovanni Regina's logic is complex, if not convoluted, yet one that is always grounded in his solid theological and juridical knowledge. If we follow it, we are often transported into a world that is no longer the world of pedantic theological discussions, but one that could be the everyday life of fourteenth-century Italy, the same socio-economic reality from which Boccaccio's narrative 'cases' also arose. Conversely, when we are enthralled by the narrative of the *Decameron*, we should not lose sight of the varied strains of discourse that form its intellectual and cultural background, a legacy to which Giovanni Regina's work must surely have made some contribution.

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