

Bolpagni, Marcello. *La geografia del Decameron*, Novate Milanese (MI): Prospero, 2016. Pp. 272. ISBN: 9788898419753.

*La geografia del Decameron* is the first monograph to address Boccaccio's spatial references through a statistical analysis of their frequency and distribution. Far from simply cataloguing the places mentioned in the hundred novellas, Bolpagni seeks coherent parameters within which to organize these data and offers visual representations of his research with choropleth maps, histograms and pie charts. Once he has confirmed Florence and Tuscany as the epicenter of Boccaccio's world, and the shipping routes of Italian merchants as the setting for the Mediterranean adventures of Boccaccio's characters, Bolpagni attempts a moral and socio-political reading of different locations in the *Decameron*. Here he adopts more canonical tools of literary criticism, such as Propp's narrative functions, Lotman's study of semiotic space and Todorov's philosophy of otherness.

Following a preface by Professor Jiří Špička and his own introduction (Chapter 1), Bolpagni gives an account of Boccaccio's geographical knowledge and of the geographic material circulating in his time, especially cartography and travel narratives. It is possible that Boccaccio knew Marin Sanudo's maps through the works of Paolino Veneto (which he read and despised intensely) and, if so, he may have consulted them in order to design Filocolo's route in the Mediterranean Sea. Boccaccio either did not know Marco Polo's *Milione* or did not consider it a valuable resource; instead, it is more probable that he read William of Rubruck's *Itinerarium*. When Boccaccio wrote the *De montibus*, though, he relied on classical, more than contemporary sources (32–34). Bolpagni cannot give a final answer as to whether he had actually read the above-mentioned works of medieval cartographers and narrators, but his claims are based on specific evidence from Boccaccio's text and solid documentation.

At the beginning of Chapter 3, Bolpagni reviews previous scholars of Boccaccio's geography, such as Asor Rosa, Mazzacurati, Branca and Picone, putting special emphasis on relevant biographical issues from our author's years in Naples and Florence. Indeed, he even considers Boccaccio's choice of place names in the *Decameron* with an eye to his experiences working for the Bardi. Boccaccio's narration is realistic and detailed, and names of families and places are chosen to be credible. Starting from Auerbach's definition of Boccaccio's "intermediate," mimetic style, Bolpagni compares the beginning of several novellas from the *Decameron* with similar passages in contemporary prose (il *Novellino*, *L'avventuroso ciciliano*, *I fioretti di San Francesco* and *Lo specchio di vera penitenza*). Although Boccaccio's supe-

riority in providing realistic narrative contexts is evident, numerous historical incongruities prove he was less interested in plausibility than he was in producing entertaining narratives. If Boccaccio raised contemporary society to the role of protagonist in his fiction, the main purpose of his novellas remained the pleasure words could give, not historical accuracy.

Chapter Four represents the core of Bolpagni's research, the section in which he employs the most original techniques readings of Boccaccio. Using Ruth Ronen's theory of frames, he divides places into three groups. Applying this method to the *Decameron*, there are 59 settings (actual places), 79 secondary frames (places that are merely mentioned or where less important action takes place, compared to the main narrative) and 11 imaginary places. Bolpagni counts each place once per novella. Names of origin (like Perugia in "Andreuccio da Perugia") are excluded from this first group. When he does have occasion to include one, Bolpagni gives priority to names of cities and specific locations, rather than regions and nations. Neighborhoods in the surrounding of a city are counted as part of that city. The most commonly recurring setting then, by far, is Florence (31 times), and the next closest is Siena (4 times), but the most impressive datapoint is the number of places that appear only once in the *Decameron*. Bolpagni creates histograms of the setting of each novella in relation to their geographic distance from the city of Florence, considered as point zero. This representation makes immediately visible the centrality of Florence for Days 6 to 9, or the connection between Italy and the topic of love in novellas in Days 4 and 5. Less obvious relationships also emerge, however, such as the fact that novellas 5 and 6 are always set in Italy, often in Tuscany. These sorts of relationships are worthy of further investigation.

Bolpagni dedicates Chapter 5 to Boccaccio's characters in relation to their birthland. Of 230 Italian characters, 88 are from Tuscany and 42 from Florence. After a quantitative review, with graphics and maps, Bolpagni examines the moral profile Boccaccio attributes to his characters according to their provenance, and provides historical information on which he may have based his choices. Of course, Florentines associated certain virtues with their city and often expressed great pride in their citizenship. Living at the center of a commercial and banking empire, Florentines prized their own frugality, intelligence, cunning and industriousness, particularly in comparison to peasants and outsiders. These new values, in which lay Florentine excellence, are well exemplified by characters like Guido Cavalcanti (6.9), Federigo degli Alberighi (5.9) and Cisti the Baker (6.2). Names of places inside Florence are very specific, particularly in novellas 6.9 and 8.3 (containing the itineraries of Cavalcanti and Calandrino). Stories of tragedy or great liberality, in Day 4 and 10, are often set in distant locations, where

traditional chivalric values were thought to be strong and about which geographic knowledge was vaguer. Other cities were the objects of Boccaccio's scorn for reason of business and political rivalry, like Venice and Siena (whose inhabitants are among the few in the *Decameron* who speak in dialect), but also Pisa, Perugia and Prato (hometown of homosexuals like Pietro di Vinciolo and Ciappelletto). A section of Chapter 5 focuses on the novellas that take place in Sicily, an island whose geography was imagined politically (dynasties fighting each other and constant turmoil) and also morally (foreign merchants passing through, local women trying to seduce and deceive them). The tales set in Naples lie on a sort of spectrum running between novellas concerning Sicily, where the historical (albeit inaccurate) dimension prevails, and those set in other Italian cities on the mainland, in which there is more moralistic content. In the following section, Bolpagni deals with Boccaccio's depiction of the Islamic world, comparing him with less 'benign' authors such as Matteo Bandello and Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio of the *Ecatommiti*. Looking at the stories of Zinevra (2.9) and Gostanza (5.2), Bolpagni explains that Boccaccio portrayed enriching encounters with Islamic populations. The chapter ends with an account of magical places and the afterlife in the *Decameron*. Even though there are moments when the magical or supernatural impinges on reality (as in Nastagio's infernal vision or Torello's flight on an enchanted bed in 10.9), Boccaccio usually treats the supernatural with lighthearted humor.

Chapter 6, the final one before the conclusion, examines the theme of travel. The main case study centers on Alatiel's novella (2.7). Bolpagni compares on a map the route the princess was supposed to take (from her homeland to the kingdom of Garbo) with the fictional one she narrates to her father (called by Bolpagni the *controviaggio*). Then he analyzes in depth the historical and economic background of Alatiel's adventure, alongside the novella's narrative structure, concluding that Alatiel's story is in fact a parody of Ancient Greek novels, in which marriage is commonly postponed without compromising the bride's chastity. Especially in comparison to the model of ascent through sin (as in Lotman's reading of medieval Christian narratives in Russia) or to the learning experiences inherent in the voyages of Zinevra (2.9) and Gostanza (5.2), Alatiel's journey comes across as an erotic and erudite *divertissement* on the theme of travel. The rest of the last chapter examines the motif of circularity (the *Ringkomposition*, or *nostos*, as Bolpagni suggests) in most of the *Decameron's* travel stories (with the noteworthy exceptions of 2.3 and 4.3) and concludes with one last map, which is devoted to Filocolo's convoluted wandering as a preview of the Mediterranean adventures recounted in Boccaccio's masterpiece.

Bolpagni's study of moral geography may not be a landmark in the vast bibliography on the *Decameron*, but his analysis of narrative patterns is both convincing and well informed. Throughout the book, he provides a rich apparatus of maps and graphs. His research method is new, and its statistical results are both accessible and inspiring. The data Bolpagni collects, elaborates and graphically presents are refreshing, particularly against the backdrop of many previous — and often vague — studies of Boccaccio's geography, in which geographic references are collected without regard to coherent criteria or the centrality of certain places and themes of a given Day are thought of as self-evident. Bolpagni's work can serve both as a solid starting point for future studies on spatiality in the *Decameron* and as a useful teaching tool.

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