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NOTE

This article is the fourth main article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are "Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages" by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), "The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*" by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), "John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*" by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), "From Sorcerer's Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*" by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), "Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert's *Roman de Dolopathos*" by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–32) and "Entanglements" by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explain why a set of 'fabulous' stories about Virgil were adopted as part of a learned Latinate tradition in the twelfth and early thirteenth century. It suggests that the answer lies in the distinctive politics of southern Italy in this period. Scholars and administrators, many of them trained in cathedral schools of northern Europe, arrived in southern Italy and encountered there local legends about Virgil's magical protection of Naples and its inhabitants. These men were already primed to be interested in the classical poet. They also recorded, adjusted, and preserved these legends as a source of important historical information for their own masters—the kings and emperors who aspired to rule the region and whose hold on power was often unsteady. This was a decisive step, for it meant that the Virgil of the classical curriculum and liberal arts tradition became tied to a particular southern Italian landscape and series of monuments. This, in turn, paved the way for fourteenth-century 'humanist' visitors to the region, including Petrarch, who were particularly keen to explore the sites of Virgil's life. As this article argues, however, interest in the physical and material 'remains' of the poet, and the relationship between ancient texts and contemporary topography, was in origin a twelfth-century entanglement, not an early modern one.

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1 Introduction: Petrarch

I begin with the medievalist's old adversary, Petrarch, who (as any student of historiography will tell you) hit upon the concept of a 'Middle Age': a period of ebbing intellectual energy between the great achievements of classical Rome and

its later renewal.[1] While many medievalists have spent their careers railing against this characterisation, the idea still frames the discipline of medieval history. Both Petrarch's writings and his sense of self are tied up in this peculiar temporal awareness. Petrarch ardently hoped that his own era might attempt to emulate ancient greatness, while, at the same time, regretting that such aspirations might not be realised. This sensibility did much to produce the idea of the 'medieval' as a difficult middle. It also helped define the movement we refer to as early modern humanism: in its simplest terms, a longing to return to the artistic achievements of the classical world and to emulate its glories.[2]

Nowhere was Petrarch's rarefied sense of his own relationship to antiquity more evident than during his journey to Naples in February 1341. On this trip, Petrarch's awareness of the ancient past was projected onto the local landscape. The visit was prompted by his preparation for his forthcoming laureation ceremony in Rome. He travelled to southern Italy to visit Robert of Anjou (King of Naples, Count of Provence), his sponsor.[3] His conversation with Robert of Anjou inevitably turned to the classical world. The king and the poet pondered the allegorical meaning of the *Aeneid*. They also took an excursion to the site known as the "Tomb of Virgil."[4] There the two men visited the grotto which had reputedly been created by the Virgil as his resting place.[5] Recalling the visit nearly two decades later, Petrarch still marvelled at the vastness and darkness of the space. During their time in the tomb, King Robert supposedly asked Petrarch whether he believed the stories told by the credulous, that the antique poet had been a sorcerer and employed the magic arts to fashion his tomb. Not at all, replied Petrarch (supplying a witticism he evidently enjoyed recounting even many years later), for the space had clearly been wrought by human hands, and he had never read that Virgil was a marble mason ("nusquam me legisse marmorarium fuisse Virgilium").[6]

What could be more 'humanist' than this Petrarchan day trip and these remarks? That is, if by humanism we understand an appreciation of the classical world that sees its participants as living human beings, not dryly abstract textual authorities, and which shows a conscious reverence towards the ancients. This sensibility was embodied elsewhere in Petrarch's life and works, not least in a series of letters to ancient authors, which, naturally, included a letter to Virgil, expressing a wish that Virgil could know the renown in which his works were held after his death.[7] Petrarch would not be the last visitor to the Neapolitan grotto which came to be known as the tomb of Virgil. Attention waxed and waxed between the

1 The classic statement of this is Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages.'" For a more recent assessment, see Goldin Folena, "Petrarca e il medioevo latino."

2 For engagement with this problem, see Summit, "Topography and Historiography."

3 On the relationship between the two, see Sturm-Maddox, "'Altissima verba.'"

4 Much has been written on the tomb of Virgil. For a sample, see: Trapp, "Virgil and the Monuments" and Trapp, "Grave of Vergil." The latter is an important survey of knowledge of Virgil's tomb over time.

5 The grotto and its location are discussed further in Trapp, "Virgil and the Monuments," 3.

6 Petrarch recorded this story in his *Itinerarium Syracium* [36]; the Latin and a translation of the passage is provided in Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 415–16. See also Trapp, "Grave of Virgil," 8.

7 Petrarch, *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus*, XXIV.11, 290–92.

fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Anyone who aspired to be any kind of humanist personage made the trip; Erasmus took his students.[8]

The claim is often made that Petrarch and his successors represented a new kind of relationship to both the classical past and the Christian era, a claim to which I will return at the end of this article.[9] For now, we should note Petrarch's desire not merely to comprehend the text of Virgil, but to understand Virgil better by coming close to the sites that Virgil had known. Only through immersion in that landscape could he comprehend the dimensions of the poet's life. That sentiment made it into Petrarch's oration for his coronation as laureate on 8 April 1341.[10]

2 The twelfth century context

2.1 Virgil in the twelfth and early thirteenth century

I have spent so long on Petrarch because the purpose of this paper is to think about the "pre-history" to Petrarch's visit to Virgil's tomb, and to ask whether Petrarch's connection to Virgil was really without precedent in earlier periods. Scholars have noted that the medieval world knew of the association with Naples and the location of Virgil's supposed grave; the connection was not invented by Petrarch. Yet when such visits are noted in the scholarship, they appear as little more than prologue: the 'big bang' lies in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[11] My contention is that the critical moment of Latinate engagement with Virgil in southern Italy occurred some 150 years before Petrarch. Petrarch's knowledge of Virgil's tomb relied on an earlier series of discussions, emerging in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was the product of two distinctive shifts, through which the transnational traditions of the schoolroom and the local stories of southern Italy became intertwined.

The first shift was a literary one. The proliferation of classical literacy entailed the growth of an educated administrative class across much of western Europe; a group of men whose pedagogical and moral formations were vested in the Latin classics and an idea of the liberal arts revived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This educational change has been noted by many scholars; we might refer to it in shorthand as the 'twelfth-century renaissance.' The second shift was political and particular to southern Italy. The rapidly shifting political dynamics in the region in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries meant the creation of new regimes to whom Virgil was presented and advertised. Both these shifts laid the ground for

[8] Tatham, "Erasmus in Italy," 660.

[9] For instance, Celenza, "Petrarch, Latin, and Italian Renaissance Latinity," 511–13; and for a sense of the complexity of the question, Eisner, "In the Labyrinth."

[10] Petrarch, *Collatio laureationis*, 6. In fact, in making this point Petrarch utilised Cicero, *De Legibus,* II.4, and the pleasure that is to be gained from contemplating the deeds of great men when surrounded by their tombs. An English translation is provided by Wilkins, "Petrarch's Coronation Oration." More broadly for the significance of the oration and the idea of a "break" with the medieval past, Regn and Huss, "Petrarch's Rome," 87–88.

[11] For example, Hendrix, "Virgil's Tomb."

Petrarch's visit. Late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century authors approached the great poet in a way that parallels Petrarch's vision. Virgil is treated not merely a great authority of the schoolroom, as a body of textual knowledge, but as an eminence they might appreciate through their own experiences with the southern Italian landscape and its monuments. In short, this paper is essentially about how a tradition came into being, and how twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors came to vest Virgil in a particular landscape.[12]

We should recognise the give-and-take in the dynamics of this process. The Latinate authors discussed in this article did not straightforwardly impose 'their' vision of Virgil on southern Italy.[13] Their understanding of the poet and his significance was shaped by the places they encountered and the stories they were told. Nor, however, were they mere copyists who transmitted the tales beyond southern Italy; Virgil's life and deeds were sifted and enhanced to serve greater political and personal purposes. This was a collaborative process, albeit an inadvertent one: in other words, an entanglement.

It is prudent to insert a note of caution here. As is well known, Virgil had a vast, long, and complex medieval afterlife.[14] In no medieval century was there any shortage of enthusiasm for Virgil. In that sense, the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries were by no means distinct. However they also saw a new use for Virgil. It was at this moment that a set of highly literate, often scholastically-trained, authors encountered and set about transforming local southern Italian traditions and folklore. Two quite separate parts of a Virgilian tradition were joined.

The first of these parts belonged to the world of the schoolroom, the study of grammar, and the *accessus ad auctores*. In that tradition, Virgil was an authority and model. The second tradition (harder to make out, though not altogether impossible to detect) belonged to southern Italy specifically. It was this tradition which claimed a special relationship between Naples and Virgil as the guardian of the city. The tradition also seems to have endowed Virgil with protective (even magical) powers. Interesting things happened when these two collided. A 'local' body of legends about Virgil was for the first time codified, restructured and presented for elite audiences. It also meant that those local claims were pressed into political service, where they might seem most useful.

[12] Stok, "Virgil between the Middle Ages and Renaissance," similarly positions the period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries as decisive for the development of Virgilian legends. It is also valuable for its discussion of manuscript evidence for the circulation of 'lives' of Virgil which supplement (and embellish) information found in the *accessus* (20). However, as I argue here, it is essential to understand exactly why these learned Latinate authors were present in southern Italy, and the political situation that prompted their engagement with Virgil for a royal and imperial audience. Many of the authors discussed in this article are also surveyed in Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer*.

[13] Indeed, as Wolsing argues in his contribution to this special issue, historians too often assume a separation between Latinate culture and the vernacular world that surrounded it, ignoring the hints that authors and ideas moved fluidly between the two.

[14] The most important recent work for anyone wishing to understand the extent of Virgil's medieval afterlife is the volume by Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*. This volume provides an excellent survey for anyone wishing to comprehend the extent of Virgil's influence throughout the Middle Ages. This paper attempts to put some of those uses of Virgil in a more precise political and literary context, and to elaborate the parallels between a certain group of twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors.

The 'learned' tradition of Virgil—the kind one finds in the schoolroom—made some brief reference to southern Italy. The two most important sources of information on Virgil were the late antique works composed by Aelius Donatus and Servius in the fourth and fifth centuries.[15] Both these texts briefly indicated Virgil's connection to Naples. Both told essentially the same story: after Virgil's death, the poet's bones had been buried in a tomb two miles outside Naples, along with an epitaph which he himself had composed. The accounts of Aelius Donatus and Servius were widely read, and they were also amplified. By the time we reach the ninth and tenth centuries, more details were being drawn out of these biographies: Virgil composed the *Georgics* in Naples, for example, but the *Aeneid* in Rome.[16]

Nonetheless, the biographical information contained in the commentary tradition remained limited. The medieval schoolroom required only as much information as would illuminate a discussion of the *materia*.[17] By the early twelfth century, and Conrad of Hirsau's *Dialogus super auctores*, the relevant biographical details for the student of Virgil were largely those which explained the relationship between Virgil and Augustus. Conrad's *accessus* notes that though he had died at Brindisi, Virgil's body was moved to Naples and interred there, accompanied by an epitaph that the poet had composed for himself.[18] But—as with all the authors in the *accessus* tradition—the details of the poet's life are only useful so far as they explain and uphold the *utilitas* of the poem: the information required to bring Virgil safely and fruitfully into a Christian canon. Young men (or, as we should really think of them, boys) trained in the medieval Latin canon were introduced to Virgil at an early point in their education. Commentaries on Virgil were a fundamental part of the acquisition of grammar, the starting point of the *trivium*.[19] Students were also equipped with certain, albeit limited, biographical details. They knew the poet as one of the great authors of pre-Christian antiquity, and one of the first markers of a knowledge of the liberal arts.

2.2 The politics of southern Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

It is here I turn to the second part of my argument: the particular political circumstances of southern Italy in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These are likely to be less well known to a general audience of medieval scholars than the medieval enthusiasm for Virgil. To put it simply: control of southern Italy was changing in dramatic ways. In the space of less than a century, three dynasties attempted to establish their control of the region, to maintain their authority against other claimants, and to mould a new political unit. The first of these attempts was 'Norman,' or rather, belonged to the Hauteville dynasty, descended

15 For a more detailed discussion, see Tarrant, "Aspects of Virgil's Reception," and Stok, "Commenting on Virgil."

16 See Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 246–47.

17 Quain, "The Medieval Accessus," and Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, remain the best starting points for understanding the tradition.

18 Conrad, *Dialogus super auctores*, 120–22. See also Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 740–44.

19 For example, Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, ii.29, 46. For a more detailed discussion of one twelfth-century manuscript of Virgil and its use in education, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, especially ch. 2.

from minor nobility in Normandy. The second was Staufen, led by Henry VI, son of Frederick Barbarossa. A third (still more short-lived), was the attempt of the Welf emperor, Otto IV, to claim Sicily and southern Italy around 1210. Each of these was an attempt to create a new political order in the region, and to give shape to a new polity.

The future Roger II created his realm by holding Apulia, Calabria, and the island of Sicily, in addition to claiming the Duchy of Capua.[20] It was only through the contingencies of inheritance—a lack of other family heirs—combined with careful manoeuvring that these territories came together under a single ruler in 1127. There was no precedent for these territories making up a distinct entity ruled by a single king, and no crown associated with them. In the centuries before the millennium, southern Italy had been a mosaic, with control split between different local lords and Lombard princes, and lingering remnants of Byzantine power in the east of the region: Sicily had been part of an Islamic emirate from the mid-ninth to the later eleventh century (the dates are inexact because conquest was a slow process).

Roger II's ambitions created a new political unit. He had inherited an assemblage of territories; he wished to transform his title into that of king. There were political problems: his claims were objectionable to the papacy, to both German and Byzantine emperors, and to many local lords in southern Italy. But there were also significant conceptual problems. There was no obvious unity to these territories—whether political, linguistic, or administrative. There was no shared founding myth other than the self-created myth of Roger himself. Nor could Roger claim descent from any distinguished ancestor: the greatest of his forebears had been only a minor Norman knight. Moreover, not all the cities of southern Italy welcomed the Hauteville claim. In a sense, Roger's lack of roots in the region were a less pressing problem than the military challenges, invasions, and rebellions faced and fended off throughout his reign. Nonetheless, within the cultural and intellectual life of the new Kingdom of Sicily in the 1130s and 1140s, Roger and the great men of his court were eager for works that would proclaim the new dynasty's legitimacy and authority. As is well known, Roger was willing to borrow from many different sources of such authority.[21] As we will see, Virgil proved a useful element of this process.

It is important to appreciate, however, that a similar (though not identical) process was repeated at the end of the twelfth century, less than seventy years after Roger II first claimed to be the new ruler of something called the Kingdom of Sicily. By the late 1180s, the dynasty founded by Roger II had run out of steam—or at least run out of viable male heirs. The kingdom was—with considerable difficulty—conquered by the German emperor Henry VI. Henry asserted his rights

[20] Despite the numbering, Roger II was the first king of the Kingdom of Sicily; "II" refers to his earlier title as Count of Sicily. It should also be noted that Roger's use of the title of 'king' was sometimes applied only to the island of Sicily, and the title of 'Duke of Apulia and Calabria' continued to be used in certain contexts for the mainland. For an overview of Roger's kingship and the politics of the reign, see Houben, *Roger II*. For Roger's attempt at crafting himself as a ruler, Weiler, *Paths to Kingship*, 84–94.

[21] For instance, Vernon, "Dressing for Succession," discusses the different ways (material and ceremonial) that Hauteville dynasty and legitimacy was set before southern Italian audiences.

on two levels: both as an 'ancient' claim that the region was a part of the Roman empire, but also on behalf of his wife, Constance, who was the daughter of Roger II. There was substantial ambiguity during his reign about exactly how Sicily fitted within the other territories ruled by Henry VI. It was not straightforwardly absorbed into the empire.[22] Here too Virgil could be utilised: an imperial poet for an imperial court. Control of southern Italy gave Henry VI (and his courtiers) direct connection to the sites of the classical (imperial) world. The pattern continued after Henry VI's unexpected death in 1197, when another German emperor, from a new dynasty—the Welf Otto IV—made clear his designs on southern Italy. Otto too was well aware of the rich Virgilian associations of the region.

Regardless of which master they served, learned (Latinate) authors responded to the political confusion in southern Italy in a similar way. They offered up the classical past to the new rulers of the region. Men seeking patronage and advancement offered to connect new rulers to the land of Virgil, albeit in different ways. It was not that Roger II, Henry VI, or Otto IV made a personal effort to 'discover' Virgil, but rather that the intellectual circles around them found in the figure of the ancient poet something memorable and potentially politically useful. In other words, it is no coincidence that attention to the details of Virgil's 'biography' expanded rapidly in twelfth century southern Italy, given a situation of increased Latinity among elite servants and dramatic political change.

These Latinate authors drew on a set of southern Italian traditions that had been coalescing around the figure of Virgil for some time, as part of a local, and likely largely oral tradition. Such traditions only become visible to historians, however, when they are recorded in writing (and that writing is preserved). Needless to say, the oral traditions of the Middle Ages cannot be accessed with any certainty. However, the balance of evidence does suggest that twelfth-century authors were codifying a local tradition, which associated Virgil with several sites in Naples.[23] These are claims specific to a Neapolitan landscape, down to its particulars. My contention in what follows is that such associations were not invented by Latinate northern European scholars who visited Naples, only recorded by them. From what those scholars recorded, we can make out something of the shape of those pre-existing traditions and associations. They concerned not only Virgil's burial in Naples, but more broadly his special patronage and protection of the city. Virgil was also credited with having improved the city in various ways: by creating devices that fended off unwelcome pests, facilitating trade, and protecting visitors. One story, for instance, described how Virgil assisted the butchers of the city by using his arts to prevent the meat in the market from putrefying.[24]

[22] See the discussion in Byrne, "Translating German Emperors."

[23] See the comments in Kelly's introduction to the *Cronaca di Partenope*, 66. She argues, convincingly, that stories of Virgil in Naples originated not with outsiders, but with "local" attempts to explain the features of the landscape, and that they developed over time. See too the comments of Delle Donne, "Virgiliana Neapolis Urbs," 166. We cannot, of course, rule out the possibility that written versions of these stories existed before the twelfth century, and were employed and reworked by twelfth-century authors, but I know of no surviving examples.

[24] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, 3.12, 577–79.

3 Alexander of Telese and Gervase of Tilbury

The first southern Italian example comes from Alexander of Telese, abbot of San Salvatore in Campania. The monastery of San Salvatore was in the north of the newly established Norman kingdom, about fifty kilometres inland from Naples. Alexander was writing during the early part of Roger's reign, before 1143. He does not, however, perfectly fit in the pattern set out above—Alexander's use of Virgil is relatively brief, and, as we know almost nothing about his biography, there is no evidence he was an outsider to southern Italy.[25]

Alexander's *Ystoria Rogerii regis* contains only two short references to Virgil. They are, however, important for understanding the wider picture. First is Alexander's claim that Virgil was lord of Naples (*urbis dominus*), a position he held with the approval of Augustus.[26] Alexander does little more than note this information while giving a longer history of the region. Virgil is then invoked, more explicitly, in the "Alloquium," the address to Roger which accompanied the *Ystoria*, praising the king and commending Alexander to his goodwill.[27] Here the rationale for invoking Virgil is more personal, relating to the patronage of the liberal arts and their rewards. Alexander notes that Virgil composed two verses in praise of Octavian, for which Octavian rewarded the poet with dominion over Naples and Calabria. If Virgil received such rewards for only two verses, Alexander said, how much more did the author of the *Ystoria* hope for from Roger II.

As Eleni Tounta has written, Alexander's view of the history of southern Italy was shaped by his contact with members of the Hauteville family—particularly Roger's sister, Matilda. Indeed, Alexander probably met Roger himself on more than one occasion.[28] For Alexander, Roger was a preferable alternative to the disgraced Lombards who had previously attempted to exert rulership in the region. Other contenders for authority had proved themselves inadequate to the task: Roger was the only one among his contemporaries capable of governing the whole region, and, crucially for a man of the church, bringing peace to the land.[29]

Roger's claim and crown were new, but, in the context of the *Ystoria*, it made sense for Alexander to call attention to the illustrious classical history of the lands that Roger sought to exercise rule. Alexander saw both the political and personal utility of invoking Virgil. Alexander, however, is a rare witness: his is one of the few chronicles from within the Norman realm. As others have observed, the kingdom was not a centre of historical writing, and no 'official' histories were endorsed

[25] The most important recent work on Alexander is Krumm, *Herrschaftsumbruch und Historiographie*. Krumm situates the text as a product of, and response to, the crisis of lordship accompanying the early years of Roger II's rule.

[26] Alexander of Telese, *Ystoria*, 3.19, 69–70. The origin of the idea that Virgil was 'lord' of Naples is a complex question, as discussed in Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 921–22. They suggest that it may derive from a medieval misreading of a passage in Seneca's *Natural Questions*.

[27] Alexander of Telese, *Ystoria*, 89.

[28] Tounta, "Terror and Territorium," 143. See also the comments of Taviani-Carozzi, "De Robert Guiscard au roi de Sicile."

[29] Tounta, "Terror and Territorium," 145.

by the court.[30] It is not until later in the twelfth century that we encounter our next witness to the tradition.

However, let us first look further forwards. If we turn to Gervase of Tilbury, writing in the early thirteenth century, we get a much clearer view of how local Neapolitan tradition was being codified (and possibly polished) for a Latinate and courtly audience. Gervase's major surviving work is an encyclopaedia known as the *Otia imperialia* ("Recreation for an Emperor"), presented to the Welf emperor Otto IV (r.1209–18). Before he entered courtly service, Gervase had received a first-class scholastic education, culminating in a period first studying and then teaching at Bologna. That education made him a useful servant and administrator, and, in the 1180s, he was in the Kingdom of Sicily, in the service of William II (Roger II's grandson). Gervase was so good a servant that he was given a house in Campania as a reward, where he could escape the heat of summer in Palermo.[31] Many of the stories and "marvels" Gervase presented to Otto in the *Otia* had been collected during his time in the Norman kingdom. Gervase's time in southern Italy allowed him to absorb some of these local stories about the enduring presence of Virgil in and around Naples; he tells us as much himself.

Gervase's stories about Virgil and his presence in Naples are primarily about the poet's protection of the city through the use of his special powers. Importantly, Gervase treats this information seriously. Such stories may be entertaining, but, they are—to borrow the phrase used by Nancy Partner to describe twelfth-century history writing—"serious entertainments."[32] The *Otia imperialia* collected information about marvellous and unusual events. But none of them were 'fabulous' in the sense of being untrue or complete inventions. Gervase affirms that he had witnessed many of these seemingly incredible phenomena (not just the Virgilian ones) himself: *expertus sum* ("I experienced it"), he writes.[33]

Gervase does not confine his material on Virgil and Naples to a single chapter of the *Otia imperialia*, but spreads it thematically across the third book, grouping Virgil's wonders with others from the known world. For instance, Gervase describes how Virgil created a bronze image of a fly: this fake fly had the power to keep all real flies out of Naples, thus relieving the inhabitants of the city from a source of annoyance and ill health. It is narrated earnestly, as the third in a series of stories about protection from nuisance insects. In the first of these stories, Gervase recounts information about a church building in Le Puy, Bourges, in which no spider or fly can remain. Gervase implies it is the power of the relics held by the church that dispels arachnids and insects.[34] The second story in the series describes a house belonging to a college of canons in Barjols, Aix, which, similarly, no fly can settle. Gervase notes that he was doubtful about the truth of this story but had himself tested it and found that the reports were true (*comperiens*

30 On this point, see Loud, "History Writing." For eleventh-century attempts at using history to legitimise Norman claims in southern Italy, see Lucas-Avenal, "Le récit de Geoffroi Malaterra."

31 Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, 3.12, 579.

32 Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England*.

33 Ibid., 578.

34 Ibid., 3.10, 567–68.

veriorem).[35] Virgil's creation of the bronze fly is the third in this series of stories, with no indication that it is to be doubted—only to be marvelled at. In short, Gervase presents these stories of Virgil's life as legitimate and worthy of both recording and remembrance.

There are several more stories in the *Otia* which deserve comment. One is the tale of an English master who attempted to remove Virgil's bones from the tomb and to take them away from the city for study. The Neapolitans were—unsurprisingly—unwilling to cooperate with the removal, even when commanded to allow it by Roger II, for they feared the destruction of the city would follow.[36] The nature of the story is worth remarking upon, as it suggests an interesting dynamic: here are the Neapolitan population resisting external attempts to give away or remove their rarest treasure. What is even more striking than the association between Virgil's physical presence and the endurance of the city is the underlying premise of the story. Gervase clearly finds it plausible that a "master" (*magister*) would have been interested in travelling to Naples with the express purpose of uncovering more about Virgil's life and his supposed powers. The man who sought out the bones was no strange figure from the fringes of society but rather "a man of great learning: proficient and highly talented at the trivium and quadrivium, he had achieved much in medical studies, and was unrivalled in astronomy."[37]

If we assume that Gervase was recounting a story which he had heard and believed to be plausible, this must reinforce the idea that southern Italy in this period was regarded as a 'destination' for getting closer to Virgil. Even in the twelfth century there were stories about men seeking out his tomb. Admittedly, there are some differences between Gervase's *magister* and Petrarch. Both hoped to visit the tomb of Virgil, but the twelfth-century master travelled in the hope that he would find in the tomb a volume containing all Virgil's magical secrets: in other words, that discovering Virgil would unlock a source of power and profit. By contrast, in Petrarch's account of his own visit, he is driven only by a wistful desire to contemplate the grandeur of Roman antiquity.

Elsewhere, Gervase's information about Virgil in Naples firmly ties the life of the poet to the physical and material aspects of the city and its surroundings. Gervase records the claim (discussed further below) that the complex of healing baths in southern Italy, on the Bay of Naples, were established and augmented by Virgil.[38] Gervase also notes that there are no poisonous snakes in Naples because Virgil managed to trap all dangerous reptiles under the stones of a road leading to the city. Virgil is repeatedly connected to the fabric of the city, associated with the gates and structures that could still be seen in Gervase's own time. We see this element again when Gervase describes how the poet set up a garden on the sides of the local mountain, its slopes so sheer that it would seemingly be impossible for anything to grow there. But the 'proofs' are there: the plants sown by Virgil

[35] Ibid., 3.10, 574–75.

[36] Ibid., 3.112, 803–5.

[37] The translation is that of Banks and Binns: "Erat [...] summe literatus, in trivio et quadrivio potens et accutissimus in fisica operosus, in astronomia summus," 3.112, 802.

[38] *Otia Imperialia*, 3.15, 587.

can still be seen there, including one which cures blindness in sheep when they accidentally consume it.[39]

It was probably Gervase who first put many of these stories into writing in Latin, and Gervase's text is quoted and borrowed by several later authors. For instance, Gervase (though not Gervase alone) seems to have been a key source for the fourteenth-century *Cronaca di Partenope* which would go on to reorganise, develop, and add its own stories of Virgilian presence and associations with Naples.[40]

Why bother to record such stories, in an authoritative, self-consciously 'scholastic' Latin? It was not merely because from a high-minded desire to preserve knowledge of the past. Gervase was writing for an emperor (Otto) who had designs on southern Italy, and who, like German emperors before him, considered the region a 'natural,' even integral, part of the Holy Roman Empire. Yet, in practical terms, Otto had very limited success in achieving any control over Italy. He made some gains in the north during the early part of his reign, but attempts to extend southwards were a disaster and irrevocably damaged his relationship with the papacy, resulting in his excommunication. Nonetheless, those who served Otto understood his ambitions. If Otto wished to rule Italy, he needed to understand its local culture. The material Gervase presents in the *Otia imperialia* presents Otto with a repository of knowledge about his territories; making distant landscapes 'real' to the man who claimed them, and hoped one day to visit them as a triumphant conqueror. Any would-be ruler of southern Italy (here Otto was much like Roger II before him) must comprehend the special connection between Virgil and Naples.

This twelfth century moment is when we see southern Italian claims about Virgil—quite possibly already of long standing—entering a "learned" Latin tradition. Virgil's presence in the landscape was written into texts that are explicitly "transnational," and which are addressed explicitly to a courtly audience. Understanding the "local" Virgil allowed imperial readers and governors to enhance their rule.

This argument, of course, is premised upon the idea that these twelfth- and thirteenth-century visitors did not invent these stories or import them, but only remodelled, renovated, and transmitted them: that they belonged first to a local tradition. This is something of an assumption, but I think it is a sound one for several reasons. First, though these stories of Virgil travelled widely in the later Middle Ages, they seem to have appeared first in southern Italy. This is their point of origin. Second, the details of these stories are so closely tied to recognisable features of Neapolitan landscape, that it is hard to imagine them making sense to any other audience. Tales about Virgil as the magical guardian of a meat-market in Naples might please audiences in southern Italy (and Neapolitan butchers in particular), but they were at best bizarre curiosities when recounted elsewhere. To more distant readers, casting spells over putrefying meat might even have seemed beneath the dignity of the great poet of the schoolroom. Third, these Latinate

[39] Ibid., 3.13, 584. The story of the garden is also reported by Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum*, ii.174, 310.

[40] Kelly, *Cronaca di Partenope*, 66–67.

twelfth-century authors rarely invented from scratch. Their methods were to borrow and improve by recounting existing material in a more elegant fashion; Gervase styles himself as a collector of interesting knowledge. In other words: we can make out a set of local claims, if only in outline.

4 Conrad of Querfurt and Peter of Eboli

The final two authors I wish to mention in this regard belong to the same imperial context: Conrad of Querfurt and Peter of Eboli. In fact, both were writing during the period before Otto IV. Both Conrad and Peter 'served' (in a certain sense) the regime of Henry VI after his conquest of Sicily in the 1190s. Conrad was Henry's chancellor; Peter an aspiring court poet who appealed to Conrad for patronage: indeed, the illustrations to another of Peter's surviving works depict him presenting his scholarship to Conrad, the representative of Staufen authority in the region.[41] Both Peter and Conrad, it is important to note, were well educated men; "literate" in the medieval sense of that term.

I begin with Conrad.[42] He provides example of the new kinds of elites produced by twelfth-century changes to education. From a noble background (his father was a burgrave in Saxony), Conrad was the product first of the cathedral school of Hildesheim, and subsequently went on to study at the schools in Paris.[43] It was this combination of elevated birth plus elite education that fitted him for ecclesiastical and imperial office: becoming Henry VI's chancellor, before also being made Bishop of Hildesheim in 1194.

Conrad's impressions of southern Italy survive in a letter of his, preserved in the *Chronicle* of Arnold of Lübeck. The letter itself was written to Hildebert, Provost of Hildesheim. It is an account of Conrad's journey southwards to join the court in Palermo, describing both Conrad's route and the sites of antiquity he had visited on his way.[44] What is most striking is Conrad's comment about the meaning of his journey. He reflects that, with Henry VI's conquest of Sicily and southern Italy, the most distinguished sites of classical antiquity are now within the empire, adding to its lustre: "there is no need to go beyond the frontiers of the empire, no need to go beyond the sphere of German lordship, to see places on which the poets spent a great deal of time."[45]

The essence of this letter is that—from the moment he arrives in Italy—Conrad begins to encounter the sites of classical antiquity, which hitherto he has known only as names. Now those references take on specific meaning in the

41 This is the *Liber ad honorem Augusti*. The manuscript, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 120.II, can be viewed here: https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/bbb/0120-2; Conrad and Peter are depicted at fol. 139^{r}.

42 See Clarke, "Conrad of Querfurt."

43 Indeed, it can be argued that Conrad's path was not an unusual one: while German cathedral schools had led the renewal of learning in the eleventh century, students in the twelfth century frequently travelled westward to seek out the new learning of the schools in Paris. See Pixton, "The Misfiring," Thomson, "The Place of Germany," and, for the narrative of eleventh-century leadership, Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*.

44 Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, v.19, 174–83 ("epistola Conradi cancellari"). For the translation, see Loud, *The Chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck*.

45 Loud, *Chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck*, v.19, 175.

landscape. In Mantua and Cremona, he sees sites described in the *Eclogues*; Modena was previously known to him only through his reading of Lucan. One need only quote a few sentences of the letter to get a taste of the whole: "Passing by the city of Chieti, where Thetis, the mother of Achilles, lived, we left the city of Nympha on our right, where from the pleasantness of the springs nymphs were imagined to exist and where they too were worshipped. We also saw Cannae, where so many noble Romans were slain by Hannibal [...] We went by the city of Giovenazzo, which is called this as the birthplace of Jove, because Jupiter was born there."[46]

As Conrad makes his way further south, his descriptions of Virgilian monuments overlap with those seen by Gervase of Tilbury, again reinforcing the idea that both were drawing on a shared stock of local knowledge, possibly pointed out to them by local guides.[47] In Naples, Conrad records seeing an image of the city encased in a magical glass flask: so long as the flask is unharmed, the city remains safe.[48] Virgil was said to have made this through his magical arts. Conrad also saw a bronze horse, another item cast by Virgil, which provided protection to all the horses that visited Naples.[49] Virgil might be of particular interest, but the poet is not the only antique figure mentioned in the letter. Almost every town (or spring or temple) he passes is vested with classical meaning. On arriving in Sicily, Conrad notes the place where the minotaur was supposedly imprisoned;[50] he also drinks in the southern Italian sites associated with both St Agatha and St Paul. In this way, the landscape of the classical world is inextricably intermingled with that of early, heroic, Christianity.

Conrad of Querfurt is a useful demonstration of what happened when a 'learned' tradition of Virgil arrived in the 'land' of Virgil in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. He is by no means representative of all northern travellers to southern Italy but offers an insight into men of a particular educational background. When Conrad journeyed into southern Italy, the places that had been only references in schoolroom texts were now before his eyes. These sites were therefore worthy of record and worthy of transmission back to German lands—to others who had had a similar education. The tone of his letter is not explicitly triumphal, though there is a strong implication that now the lands of southern Italy are under imperial control, they will add to the lustre of imperial achievements. The destinies of the two territories are interlinked. The corollary of that process, however, is that southern Italy will require a particular kind of political handling because of its historical distinctiveness.[51]

[46] Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, V.19, 179; the translation is that of Loud.

[47] See Savage, "Possible Sources," 341, who suggests that Conrad of Querfurt and Gervase of Tilbury may have met in southern Italy in the late twelfth century and exchanged information about Virgilian legends. I find this possibility less likely than the conclusion that both were separately drawing on locally circulating southern Italian accounts.

[48] Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, V.19, 181–82.

[49] Ibid., V.19, 177–78.

[50] Ibid., V.19, 179.

[51] Spargo (rather unfairly) dismisses Conrad as the most "gullible" of travellers to the south in consequence of his enthusiasm for these stories, *Virgil the Necromancer*, 311.

Conrad and Gervase suggest that there was a shared appetite among those who had first encountered Virgil in the twelfth-century schoolroom—a desire to do new things with Virgil; to find new ways of imagining him or connecting themselves to him. The landscape of southern Italy provided one way of extending their understanding. This was not, of course, the only way in which Virgil was being "transformed" in the twelfth century. We might see a parallel here with other kinds of transformation and reinventions of Virgil in this period. Further north, Virgil was being drawn into a vernacular tradition and the events of his life extended and amplified in works like the *Roman d'Enéas*.[52] It is no new claim to argue that the twelfth century had a voracious appetite for antique authorities; for imitating and emulating them. But only in southern Italy was there unique access to Virgil as a 'local' figure. And it was this twelfth-century process—preserving the stories in Latin—which provided the foundations for later humanist scholarship on the subject. Indeed, Clarke has made the argument that when Petrarch located the 'entrance' to the Virgilian underworld in southern Italy, he was influenced not just by antique authorities but also by Conrad's account of his journey.[53]

My final 'witness' is Peter of Eboli. Peter was no northern incomer to the kingdom, but, as his toponym suggests, a native of southern Italy. We possess little biographical detail on him, though we can safely say he had a strong command of Latin and a firm interest in the liberal arts.[54] Peter was active in the late twelfth century and evidently hoped that Henry VI's new regime would provide him with patronage. One surviving work (a long praise poem for Henry VI) is addressed to Conrad; one lost work seems to have been a dramatic retelling of the events of the life of Henry's father, Frederick Barbarossa. The best way of characterising Peter is as a 'local' who sought to make southern Italian traditions comprehensible to the new rulers of the land, and, in doing so, win himself both patronage and acclaim as a Latin stylist.[55]

The third of Peter's works—and by far the most popular in the Middle Ages—is a poem which circulated under several names, often known by the name *De balneis Puteolanis* ("On the Baths of Pozzuoli"), in which Peter praises the healing properties of the thermal pools to be found around the Bay of Naples.[56] Most of these baths do not survive today: they were largely destroyed in an early modern earthquake. Peter was not the first to write about the baths; evidence of an earlier (prose) tradition exists. But Peter seems to have been motivated by the belief that they needed a proper—fully done, fully stylised—Latin reworking, an authoritative guide.

[52] Cormier, "A Twelfth-Century Humanist." See also the discussion in Ramani Chandramohan's article in this volume, as an example of how Virgil was increasingly inserted into new and imagined historical and literary narratives, and new biographical details provided for him.

[53] Clarke, "Conrad of Querfurt," passim. Stok, "Virgil between the Middle Ages and Renaissance," discusses how these medieval traditions were purged and "purified" of embarrassing or unbelievable details by fourteenth-century humanist writers, 20–21.

[54] The best introduction to Peter's life and works is that to be found in Kölzer and Stähl, *Petrus de Ebulo*.

[55] For a further discussion of the interpretation of the poem, see Stähli, "*Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis*."

[56] De Angelis, the editor of the recent critical edition preferred the title *De Euboicis aquis*.

Where does Virgil fit in? As mentioned above, there seems to have been a pre-existing story in circulation, claiming that Virgil had been the founder (or at least the improver) of these baths. That claim had been repeated by Gervase of Tilbury.[57] Peter does not go quite so far, though he does take pains to emphasise the association between the bath complex and classical antiquity. He states, for instance, that one of the pools was founded by Cicero.[58] However, one bath—known as *Ferrum*—is situated in an explicitly Virgilian landscape. Peter describes it as positioned next to "Lake Avernus" and a ruined temple.[59] Peter knew that his literate readers would make the connection immediately: Lake Avernus, where Aeneas began his descent to the underworld. Peter labels the temple the *Domum Vatis* (House of the Poet). Unmistakeably, this was—for anyone who had studied the basics of the school curriculum—a Virgilian landscape.

Peter's use of Virgil is partly self-serving, just as it was for Alexander of Telese. At the end of the poem, Peter reminds his emperor that no poet was poor under Augustus. The proper imperial role is to grant largesse to an artist. Just as Virgil as *vates* provided Augustus with the crowning literary achievement of his age, so Peter too might do the same—if indulged and rewarded. More meaningfully, however, Peter sold himself (in his work and others) to the new Staufen rulers of southern Italy as a 'guide' to the antiquity of the local landscape. Through him could one apprehend the cultural and political particularities of a newly-conquered land—even if Henry VI made the claim that southern Italy was his by long-standing right. We might admire Peter for his enterprise, and his attempt to carve out a position in what was an era of considerable political turbulence.

For Peter, as for Alexander of Telese and Gervase of Tilbury, Virgil's lordship of Naples represented a fixed (and glorious) point in a turning world. Southern Italy's recent past did not provide much calm or continuity. However Virgil (and his associated glories) could be a precedent for Norman, Staufen, or Welf rulers. The pump was primed from the common curriculum of the Latin schoolroom. The tradition described here became increasingly elaborate into the later thirteenth century, but the critical juncture is this moment in the later twelfth century, at which various authors—often for their own benefit and advancement—seized upon local claims and traditions. These were claims they knew would be appealing to their patrons; patrons who knew Virgil's works and who were now, for the first time, offered another dimension: the possibility of tangible connection with the poet and his life.

5 Virgil in northern Europe: Alexander Neckam

Finally, and seemingly quite rapidly, these ideas were transmitted back to northern Europe. In the last decade of the twelfth century, Alexander Neckam composed his compendium of natural sciences, *De naturis rerum*. Neckam (1157–1217) was Abbot of Cirencester; as a young man he had first studied and then taught in Paris

[57] *Otia Imperialia*, 3.15, 586.
[58] Pietro da Eboli, *De Euboicis aquis*, 138.
[59] Ibid., 146.

and Oxford. He was a distinguished scholar, but not, as far as we can establish from his biography, a traveller to southern Italy.[60] Yet in *De naturis rerum* it is apparent that northern European scholars, trained in the liberal arts, were increasingly associating the landscape of southern Italy with the life of Virgil.[61]

When Neckam discusses the liberal arts, he does not discuss them as a free-floating set of techniques for study, but as intellectual achievements tied to particular places and particular historical moments. This is made plain in a chapter entitled "On the places in which the liberal arts flourished." Neckam opens the chapter with what might be called a 'standard' medieval Latin account of the descent/genealogy of learning. First Abraham taught the quadrivium in Egypt; later Plato travelled to Egypt and learned secret knowledge; learning then passed into Greece, to Aristotle and other philosophers, then finally from Greece to Italy. In other words, the history of learning is also a set of distinct topographies. This is, of course, a version of the well-known *translatio studii*. But Neckam goes beyond a bare-bones account when he describes how it was that learning (*studium*) flourished in Italy.[62] It is in this context that Virgil is introduced. Neckam describes Virgil's achievements in protecting the people of Naples from various dangers: Virgil drove away a plague of leeches; he used his art to assist the butchers of the city by keeping their meat from putrefying; and he defended both the city (and the empire more generally) through an ingenious and elaborate set of devices.

In Neckam's account we can also appreciate how 'local' southern Italian traditions were being integrated within a scholastic framework of the liberal arts. Neckam is not alone in doing this; Gervase of Tilbury approached Virgil's achievements in a similar way. For instance, Gervase described Virgil's creation of the bronze fly mentioned earlier (which kept real flies out of the city) as achieved through *arte mathematica*.[63] More generally, the language that Gervase uses to describe Virgil's works of construction are those of skill: *miro artificio edificata*.[64]

5 Conclusion

Thus, by the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, three elements were converging in these stories of Virgil. The poet was celebrated for his achievements in building and protecting Naples. Those achievements were credited, at least in part, to his knowledge of the liberal arts—and especially to his investigations into the quadrivium and command of more esoteric or secret forms of knowledge. It was this which allowed Virgil to be configured not merely as a great poet, but also a good governor, concerned for both the city and its people.

Part of the purpose of this article has been to argue that focusing on a single author and their intervention in a Virgilian tradition is, at best, unproductive. Pinpointing the 'first' Latinate author to record Neapolitan legends of Virgil will

60 For Neckam's life see Hunt, *The Schools and the Cloister*.

61 Neckam, *De naturis rerum*, ii.174, 309–10.

62 Ibid., ii.174, 309.

63 Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, 3.10, 577. *Arte mathematica* is also the explanation given for Virgil's ability to protect travellers journeying through a narrow passage cut through rock: 3.16, 588.

64 Ibid., 3.15, 587, "constructed with wonderful skill."

not tell us much. In fact, trying to do so obscures something altogether more interesting: the process by which those traditions developed over the longer term, and the interaction between political and intellectual change. The scholastic curriculum embedded a desire for greater knowledge of Virgil; the political circumstances of twelfth- and thirteenth-century southern Italy meant that Virgil's association with the landscape was readily harnessed—both by outsiders to the region and by local men. The combination had peculiar and enduring literary consequences. By becoming intertwined with a body of Latinate, cosmopolitan, and sometimes courtly writing, local claims took on transnational forms. Conrad of Querfurt did not take an entirely 'new' Virgil back to German lands, but the Virgil of the schoolroom did take on new qualities.

Finally, let us return to Petrarch, sitting with Robert the Wise in the darkness of a Neapolitan grotto, thinking deep and humanistic thoughts. It has long been the case that trying to determine whether renaissance humanism was a break with medieval traditions or a continuance of them results in a rather arid debate, an ouroboros that devours both its own tail and the scholars pursuing it. It is true that none of the medieval authors discussed in this article show the same sharp awareness of the distance between themselves and the ancient past that we find in Petrarch. Nonetheless, they were not totally naïve. Men like Conrad of Querfurt and Gervase of Tilbury did not find a 'living' Virgil in southern Italy: they found his bones, his remnants, and the monuments he had set up. They certainly did not think of Virgil 'only' in terms of a textual authority. One could know the poet in the school room; one could know him further through the landscape of his life. For a certain group of men in twelfth-century southern Italy, Virgil could be textual *and* material, transnational *and* local at the same time.

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