

## Ports of Call: Boccaccio's Alatiel in the Medieval Mediterranean

Sharon Kinoshita and Jason Jacobs  
University of California, Santa Cruz  
Santa Cruz, California

*Revivifying [past] voices is surely one of the most pleasurable aspects of literary criticism. . . . The pleasure we take in such recovered voices is inverse to the pain of contemplating voices that have been lost, obliterated, or heavily overlaid . . . ; acceptance of final loss, however, is to be resisted with every ounce of disciplinary skill at our disposal.*

—David Wallace, *Premodern Places*

Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* II.7 recounts the adventures of Alatiel, the beautiful daughter of the sultan of Babylon (Cairo). Dispatched from Alexandria to be wed to the Muslim king of Algarve (southern part of current-day Portugal), she is shipwrecked on the island of Majorca. There she is rescued by a nobleman, Pericone of Visalgo, who, taken with her beauty, quickly seduces her. Pericone, however, is soon stabbed by his own brother, who wants Alatiel for himself. This inaugurates a string of adventures in which Alatiel passes from one man to another—including two Genoese shipowners, the prince of Achaea, the duke of Athens, the prince of Constantinople, the Turkish emir of Smyrna, and a Cypriot merchant—the strange power of her beauty driving each to murder or other acts of malfeasance in order to possess her. Eventually, in Famagusta, she is recognized by one of her father's former retainers, who returns her to the sultan and supplies her with a cover story to explain away her long absence. Restored to her rightful rank, Alatiel is once again dispatched to marry the king of Algarve, presumably to live happily ever after. Typically, this astonishing tale has been read for the ways it exemplifies the theme of the *Decameron's* Second Day (those who attain unexpected happiness after suffering a series of misfortunes); for its thematics of silence (the way Alatiel, unable to communicate with her Christian captors, conceals her identity in order to protect her reputation);

and, recently, for its representation of female agency (particularly around questions of sexuality) or its lack.<sup>1</sup>

This essay, in contrast, seeks to recontextualize Alatiel's adventures in the medieval Mediterranean. Historicizing readings of the *Decameron* tend to contextualize it in the Black Death of 1348 and, more broadly, "the mercantile world of fourteenth-century Tuscany."<sup>2</sup> Yet as is well-known, Boccaccio spent a formative part of his youth in Angevin Naples: "without Boccaccio's experience of Naples," as David Wallace has observed, the *Decameron*

would certainly have been a more limited and sombre affair, lacking those aspects of romance and courtly fantasy which nineteenth-century readers . . . found so congenial. It would also have missed that remarkable imaginative openness to the greater Mediterranean (Greek and Arab) world, which in Naples formed part of everyday life.<sup>3</sup>

Building on this insight, we begin from the assumption that, for Boccaccio's audience, the place names and historical actors populating the tale of Alatiel would have evoked powerful political, economic, and cultural associations all but lost to us today. Consider the following characterization of the mid-thirteenth- through mid-fourteenth-century Mediterranean:

*Majorca* emerged as a significant centre of trade linking Europe to Africa, Barcelona and Seville were confirmed in their role as maritime centers of the first rank, with the *Catalans* seeking to establish themselves in *Sardinia* and in Sicily, following the revolt of the Sicilian Vespers (1282), and even in the *duchy of Athens*. Meanwhile . . . Louis IX gave his support to the construction of a port at *Aigues-Mortes*, and did not stand in the way of his brother Charles of Anjou when he accepted a papal proposal to take charge of the kingdom of Naples and Sicily. . . . In the area of the Bosphorus, the restoration of the Greeks in *Constantinople* (1261) opened the Black Sea to their allies, the *Genoese*, and soon to the Venetians as well. . . . [I]n the first decades of the fourteenth century there came into being regular maritime routes towards Flanders, *Romania*, *Cyprus*, *Little Armenia*, and also towards *Alexandria*, despite the rigour of the papal prohibition against trade with the Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

All of a sudden, the stops on Alatiel's itinerary are revealed to constitute not a haphazard geography of exotic, far-flung places, but nodes in a dense network of Mediterranean politics and exchange. Furthermore, many of the people and places named in II.7 were *causes célèbres* in the decade preceding the Black Death: in 1342, Walter of Brienne, the titular "duke of Athens," was appointed *signore* of Florence, only to be violently overthrown the following year;<sup>5</sup> in 1343, Majorca reverted to direct Aragonese rule after several decades as an autonomous kingdom; in 1344, a papal coalition led by the Venetians and the Hospitallers of Rhodes captured Smyrna from the Turkish emir of Aydin;<sup>6</sup> in 1346, a Genoese expedition seized the island of Chios; and in 1347, the upstart emperor John VI Cantacuzenos captured Constantinople, putting an end to six years of civil war. Meanwhile, the Angevin kings of Naples and the Aragonese kings of Sicily were in the midst of what historian David Abulafia has called a "two hundred years' war" set off by the Sicilian Vespers of 1282—a war whose political effects reached as far as France, the Low Countries, the Balkan peninsula, North Africa, the German Empire, and England.<sup>7</sup>

It is this world, we suggest, that Boccaccio's audience would have understood as the context of Alatiel's Mediterranean adventures. Given the dizzying array of Alatiel's lovers and the confusing jumble of place-names, the almost irresistible temptation is to treat them as a largely undifferentiated mass, functioning as a kind of collective *effet de réel* on the one hand while, on the other, gesturing toward the exoticism of a vaguely defined Muslim east. It is our critical wager that attentiveness to the specificity of the names unlocks a different reading of Alatiel. This sense of the expansiveness of the fourteenth-century Mediterranean is, of course, central to Vittore Branca's reading of the way Boccaccio's mercantile experiences provided him

a point from which to observe contemporary life, *from which his gaze could sweep* beyond the commune, beyond the region, beyond even Italy, toward civilized Europe and the eventful Mediterranean, *toward everything: that is, the vast field that opened itself to the resourcefulness of those "Ulysses" of economic exchange, and that day by day was wrapped in the network of their marvelous and rapid couriers [corrieri].* If naturally Tuscany and Florence (and Siena and Pisa) are always at the center of the ideal geography of the *Decameron*, as they were also of commerce and finance, the face of the various regions is also defined with singular precision and is animated with vivid colors in the rapid but sharply drawn backgrounds of the various tales.<sup>8</sup>

Critics working in Branca's wake, on the other hand, tend to minimize Boccaccio's engagement with this larger Mediterranean world.<sup>9</sup> In the English translation of this passage appearing in *Boccaccio: The Man and his Works*, for example, the portions italicized above are simply omitted and its conclusion truncated: "Nevertheless, Tuscany and Florence (and Siena and Pisa) are always at the center of the ideal geography of the *Decameron*, as they were also of commerce and finance. However, he used other locations as well."<sup>10</sup> Gone are the "various regions . . . defined with singular precision and . . . animated with vivid colors." The loss, we suggest, is more than stylistic: what remains is a much narrower and more prosaic portrait of Boccaccio's world.

It is this sense of impoverishment and constriction that this article seeks to reverse. Working from the conviction that the disciplinary rubrics defining our areas of specialization ("medieval French history," "medieval Italian literature") often conceal as much as they reveal, we take as our analytical frame the medieval Mediterranean—the better not only to recover the "singular precision" and "vivid colors" animating the tale of Alatiel (in which Tuscany, Florence, Siena, and Pisa are, after all, conspicuous by their absence) but to restore the *Decameron* to a contentious historical world in which commerce and piracy were often two sides of the same coin, in which the Byzantine emperor was the father-in-law of a future Ottoman sultan, and in which the Mamluk ruler of Egypt reimbursed Christian merchants for the fees they expended on papal indulgences.<sup>11</sup> Rereading Alatiel in this frame is our way of revivifying "voices that have been lost, obliterated, or heavily overlaid"—as David Wallace writes in the passage we take as the epigraph to this essay<sup>12</sup>—reattuning our ears to the polyphony of this turbulent and exuberant age.

### **The medieval Mediterranean in history and fiction**

Set in the "once upon a time" of the reign of Beminedab, the sultan of Babylon, the tale of Alatiel seems to suggest an *Arabian Nights* exoticism anticipating the Orientalism of so many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works.<sup>13</sup> In Boccaccio's day, however, Babylon was simply the Latin West's name for Cairo, the capital of Mamluk Egypt which—along with Alexandria, the port from which Alatiel sets sail—had been familiar to Latin merchants and travelers for nearly four centuries.<sup>14</sup> The Pisans and the Amalfitani had established colonies in Alexandria before the year 1000.<sup>15</sup> In 1165, the celebrated traveler Benjamin of Tudela described the city as "a commercial market for all nations," frequented by merchants from many parts

of Latin Europe, Africa, and India as well as the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Egyptian customs records show Italian merchants in Alexandria, Damietta, and Tinnis importing wood and iron and exporting linen, cotton, skins, glass, sugar, alum, grain, and salt.<sup>17</sup> By the second half of the thirteenth century, Venice was sending an annual convoy to Acre and Alexandria, carefully timed to coincide with the annual spice fair and so dependable that it was used by merchants of many nations.<sup>18</sup> A Venetian merchant manual from the 1260s painstakingly details the local weights and measures used for sugar, incense, ginger-bread, brazilwood, cinnamon, pepper, copper, tin, honey, oil, cheese, and silk.<sup>19</sup> In 1323 the Franciscan Simon Fitzsimon, visiting Alexandria on his way to the Holy Land, called it “the very famous city [civitatem famosissimam] . . . , beloved by all classes of traders.”<sup>20</sup>

The port from which Alatiel departs was thus well known to Latin traders; moreover, by the mid-fourteenth century, the ship carrying her would likely have belonged to the Genoese or the Catalans—the two maritime nations later mentioned in the tale itself.<sup>21</sup> Sailing “happily” for many days, it meets “contrary winds” just past Sardinia; by the third day, the storm is so intense that

the sailors did not know where they were [and] . . . could not determine their position by calculations or by sight, for the heavens were pitch-black from the clouds and the night itself, and they were drifting not far from the coast of Majorca when they realized their boat had sprung a leak. (129)<sup>22</sup>

In the narrative logic of the story, landfall on Majorca suggests the vagaries of Mediterranean travel, the eruption of the aleatory in the sultan of Babylon’s carefully laid dynastic alliance. From the Hellenistic romance through the *Tempest*, shipwreck, along with pirate attack, is the form fortune assumes in Mediterranean literature (see a similar episode in *Decameron* IV.4).

However, this itinerary, as naval historian John H. Pryor points out, indicates just how much Boccaccio (having lived in Naples) “knew about ships and seamen.” As long as “politico-religious conditions permitted,” the route from Sardinia west to the Balearics was “the natural transverse route” for ships heading toward the Strait of Gibraltar. Majorca’s pivotal location made it “the real key to maritime control in the western Mediterranean,” particularly on the lucrative north-south routes linking Latin Europe to the ports of North Africa.<sup>23</sup> Whence the startling array of goods filling the markets of Ciutat de Mallorca:

cowrie-shells and cinnamon from the Indian Ocean, gold, wax and leather from north Africa, dried fruits from Moorish Spain and Majorca itself, wine from Valencia, woollen cloth from Catalonia, Languedoc and Flanders, raw wool from England, grain from Sicily and Sardinia, butter from Minorca, salt from Ibiza, and [most intriguingly for our purposes] large numbers of Muslim slaves.<sup>24</sup>

What is striking in Alatiel's adventure, then, is less the place where she comes ashore than the rude means of her arrival. As the vessel begins to take on water, its entire crew abandons ship in a passage that reads like a parable on the destructive nature of uncoordinated self-interest, casting those seamen (Genoese? Catalan?) plying this "natural transverse route" in a highly unflattering light:

although the men already in the lifeboat tried with knives to fight off the others and prevent them from joining them, every last sailor on board managed to jump into the lifeboat, and thinking in this way to avoid death, they all met it: in such weather the lifeboat could not support so many passengers; it went under and everyone in it perished. (129)

When the storm dissipates, Alatiel comes to, only to find all the men gone and most of her ladies dead "from seasickness and fear" (130).

If Alatiel's adventures are inaugurated by the shipwreck, they are perpetuated by her ignorance of the language of her rescuers. When she and her companions see the servant whom the Majorcan nobleman Pericone of Visalgo has sent to explore the wreckage,

they broke into tears and begged for his mercy, but when they realized that they could not understand each other's language, they tried to explain their misadventures to him with sign language. (130)

Seemingly such a realistic touch, this marking of linguistic difference is in fact exceptional in the *Decameron*, in which characters from different political, cultural, and religious spheres typically communicate with no undue difficulty. In tale IV.4, the Sicilian king's grandson and the Tunisian king's daughter fall in love and communicate without obstacle; in tale X.9, another sultan of Babylon, Saladin, his two traveling companions, and even his ser-

vants “all knew Italian and so . . . had no difficulty understanding or making themselves understood” as they travel incognito through Italy, posing as Cypriot merchants on their way from Cyprus to Paris (770–71); and in tale II.9, Madam Zinevra, the Genoese merchant’s wife who lands (cross-dressed) in Alexandria after escaping her husband’s plot to kill her, within a short time “learn[s] the language fluently” enough to become the sultan’s trusted agent (174). Despite the precipitous decline in Majorca’s Muslim population during the time of the autonomous kingdom, the scenario of a local nobleman unable to find any way of communicating with an Arabic-speaking guest/captive seems highly implausible.<sup>25</sup> Rather, the anomalous insistence on the language barrier seems to be a calculated attempt to cast Alatiel as a female character—like Griselda from *Decameron* X.10 or Chrétien de Troyes’s Enide—who remains silent in the face of adversity.

In the absence of language, identity—particularly status—is conveyed solely by visual clues: “From Alatiel’s elegant clothes and the honor paid her by the other women, [Pericone] concluded that she was of very noble birth” (131) and, struck by her beauty, “immediately decided to take her for his wife, if she had no husband, or to have her as his mistress, if he could not have her as his wife” (131). Yet “he was most unhappy that they could not understand each other’s language, for he was unable to learn who she was.” She, in the meantime,

guessed by the clothing worn by those around her that she was among Christians and approximately where she was; she realized that identifying herself was of little value and that sooner or later she would have to give in to Pericone’s desires either by force or by love [o per forza o per amore]; therefore, proudly deciding to rise above the misery of her fortune, she ordered her three servants . . . never to tell anyone who they were unless they found themselves in a situation where revealing their identity offered a clear opportunity for obtaining their freedom; besides this, she advised them, above all else, to preserve their chastity, declaring that she herself had decided never to let anyone but her husband enjoy her. Her women commended her for this and said they would do all in their power to obey her. (131)

Like the language barrier, Alatiel’s instinct to conceal her identity makes immediate sense to modern readers: she is, after all, a Saracen princess among enemy Christians. Yet in a medieval Mediterranean context, this

feels more like an artificial plot device than a reasoned decision. After all, four years later at the other end of the Mediterranean, the (Christian) king of Cyprus—having learned Alatiel's true identity—is delighted at the prospect of being able to return her to her father as a gesture of goodwill.

In the early-thirteenth-century French prose romance *La fille du comte de Pontieu*, merchants of unspecified religion carry the titular heroine to Almería and offer her as a present to its sultan. Taken with her beauty, he

began to desire and love her, and, *through a translator*, asked her to tell him to what lineage she belonged. She didn't want to say anything about it. From what he saw in her, he was convinced she was a noblewoman; he asked whether she were Christian and told her that, if she would abandon her faith, he would marry her.

Weighing her limited options (she has been cast adrift by her father for a family infraction), "She understood that it was better to act *for love* [par amours] than *to be forced* [que par force], and notified him that she agreed."<sup>26</sup> Faced with a similar option of whether to be taken by love or by force, Alatiel opts, at least momentarily, for the latter. Perhaps the difference can be explained by the differential in the potential lovers' relative status: the discarded daughter of a Christian count courted by the sultan of Almería, on the one hand, and the sultan of Babylon's daughter courted by a mere "gentleman" [gentile uomo] (130; II.7.17), on the other. The crucial difference is, however, the lack of a translator, leaving Pericone "most unhappy that they could not understand each other's language" [dolente senza modo che lei intender non poteva né ella lui] (131; II.7.22).

As Pericone's ardor and his frustration at being denied "la disiderata cosa" (II.7.25) increase, he moves from flattery "to cunning and deceit, reserving force as a last resort" (132). Cunning takes the form of plying the lady with wine—an opportunity for the narrator unobtrusively to reintroduce the topic of religious difference: "He had noticed on several occasions that the lady liked wine—as happens with those who are not accustomed to drinking it because their religion prohibits it [per la sua legge che il vietava]—so he decided that he might be able to possess her by using wine as an assistant to Venus" (132; II.7.26). At one specially arranged banquet, she is offered "various mixed wines" until, overtaken by "the pleasure of drinking" [(la) piacevolezza del beveraggio], she begins to dance "in the Alexandrian style," inspired by the sight of other female guests dancing "alla guisa di Maiolica" (132; II.7.27). Taking advantage of Alatiel's lowered guard, Pericone follows

her to her bed and, lying down beside her, “taking her in his arms, with no resistance from her, he began to enjoy her amorously.”

Earlier, Alatiel had expressed her determination that none but her husband should ever enjoy her [che mai di lei se non il suo marito goderebbe] (II.7.24); what she hadn’t counted on was her *own* capacity for enjoyment:

When she felt what it was like, never before having felt the horn men use to butt [con che corno gli uomini cozzano], she repented of having rejected Pericone’s previous advances; and not waiting a second time to be beckoned to such sweet nights again, she often invited herself—not with words, since she did not know how to make herself understood, but with actions. (132; II.7.30)

Heroines who like sex are by no means rare in the *Decameron*, and if Alatiel’s appreciation of “the horn men use to butt” lacks the poetic delicacy of the two young lovers of tale V.4 who “ma[k]e the nightingale sing time and time again” (396), what is shocking in II.7 is less her enthusiasm for sex per se than the separation of sex from love. For though in the first flush of sexual pleasure she is quite content to have traded her life as “the wife of a king” for that of “the mistress of a lord” [amica de un castellano] (132; II.7.31), her subsequent willingness to be “consoled” by sex with each lover for the death of a previous one bespeaks a mutability that, it seems, can only be rationalized as a female victim’s accommodations to the “diversi accidenti” (II.7.1) that befall her or condemned as rank promiscuity.

As Millicent Marcus has observed, the immoderate love Alatiel elicits from her beholders disrupts every conceivable human bond. Over the course of the tale, this will include the business partnership between the two Genoese merchants; the political alliance uniting the duke of Athens, the prince of Morea, and the prince of Constantinople; the marriage between the duke and duchess of Athens; and the friendship between Antioco and the Cypriot merchant.<sup>27</sup> The first casualty, however, is the family relationship between Pericone and his younger brother, Marato, who, “immensely attracted” to Alatiel, “devised a cruel plan whose evil effects followed quickly upon its inception.” Marato’s scheme is inspired by the fact that, at that moment, there happens to be “a ship, owned by two young Genoese, loaded with merchandise to be taken to Chiarenza, the chief port of the Morea (the Frankish principality of Achaea)” (133).<sup>28</sup> Only *after* arranging passage for himself and Alatiel does Marato decide how to proceed. Sneaking into Pericone’s room in the middle of the night, he murders him in his sleep, then

spirits Alatiel away onto the Genoese vessel, together with “a large part of Pericone’s valuable possessions” (133). Leaving Pericone behind as the first victim of Alatiel’s incomparable beauty, Marato takes to the high seas—his fratricide whetted and abetted by the ready availability of transport in the mercantile Mediterranean.

The ship’s direct sea voyage to Chiarenza, implausibly bypassing all ports of call in between, neatly suppresses the messy politics of the Italian peninsula: suspended between the ports of Mallorca and Chiarenza, the Genoese vessel is transformed into a floating locus of forgetfulness.<sup>29</sup> At first, Alatiel “griev[es] bitterly” over her latest misfortune until, “with the assistance of the holy Grows-in-Hand [santo cresci in man] God gave to man, Marato began to console her in such a way that she soon settled down with him, having *forgotten* Pericone [Pericone *dimenticato* aveva]” (133, trans. modified; II.7.37). For their part, the two shipowners, overwhelmed by Alatiel’s beauty, fall in love with her so passionately that, *forgetting* all else [ogni altra cosa *dimenticatane*], they put all their effort into serving and pleasing her [a servirle e a piacerle intendevano] (38; II.7.38). Following up on Boccaccio’s earlier stereotype of the Genoese as “by nature greedy and rapacious” (96; II.4.14), however, their passion inevitably takes the form of “a secret agreement” to “share the lady’s love between them—as if love could be shared like merchandise [la mercatantia] or profit [i guadagni]” (134, trans. modified; II.7.39).<sup>30</sup> Art historian Jill Caskey describes *mercatantia*, “a term with many nuances of meaning and no exact equivalent in English,” as referring to “trade and the principles guiding it, to merchandise, and to commercial transactions. It evokes the broad cultural framework of a commercial society and a variety of activities that take place within it”—a version of what Branca elsewhere calls the “ragion di mercatura.”<sup>31</sup>

Alatiel is, of course, the site of excess at the nexus of the text’s sexual and mercantile logics. She is, as Manuela Marchesini puts it, “a commodity among commodities” [merce fra merci]: this is not the only time she will be exported by sea along with “a large part” of someone’s “valuable possessions.”<sup>32</sup> Even the naughty euphemism of “santo cresci in man” points to a thematics of increase—earlier alluded to in Panfilo’s condemnation of ladies who seek to increase [acrescere] their natural beauty through wondrous art [con maravigliosa arte] (128; II.7.7)—that perhaps gestures toward the magical art of protocapital accumulation.

## Contested histories: The Italian connection

Alatiel's arrival in Chiarenza inaugurates a new series of adventures involving three successive suitors: the prince of Morea; his "friend and relative" (135), the duke of Athens; and the latter's brother-in-law Constanzio, son of the emperor of Constantinople. Far from mere fanciful toponyms evoking an exotic far-away world, their names and titles evoke the messy and violent history of early fourteenth-century Greece—an important battleground in the bitter "two hundred years' war" between Angevin Naples and Aragonese Sicily whose roots date to the middle of the previous century.<sup>33</sup> After the death of Emperor Frederick II in 1250, the pope, seeing an opportunity to dislodge Frederick's Hohenstaufen successors from their southern kingdom (comprising the southern Italian peninsula as well as the island of Sicily), awarded it to Charles of Anjou, youngest brother of the French king Louis IX (see table 1). Charles made good on the claim in 1266 by defeating and killing Frederick's son Manfred at the battle of Benevento. In 1282, however, in the uprising known as the Sicilian Vespers, Angevin rule in Sicily was overthrown and power given to Peter III of Aragon, the husband of Manfred's daughter Constance (see table 2).<sup>34</sup> Over the next several decades, the Angevins (their rule now confined to the peninsular kingdom of Naples) waged continual war on the Aragonese kings of Sicily—a conflict quickly superimposed on the ongoing hostility between the papacy and the empire.<sup>35</sup>

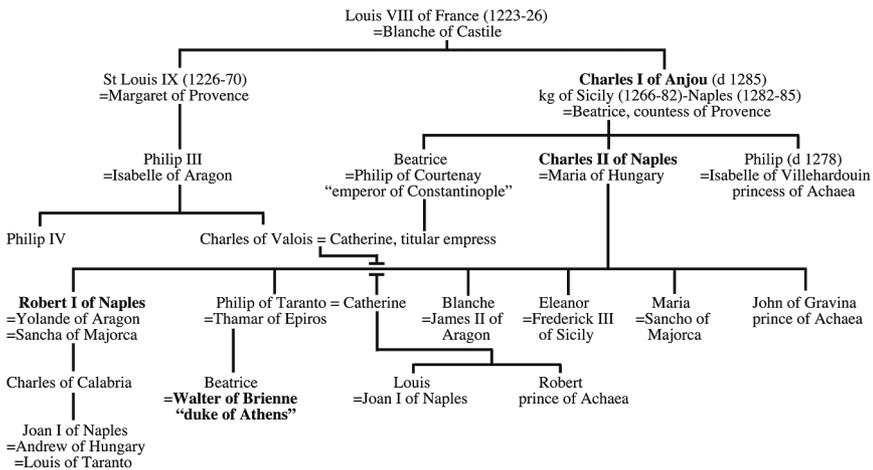


Table 1.  
*The Angevin kings of Naples.*

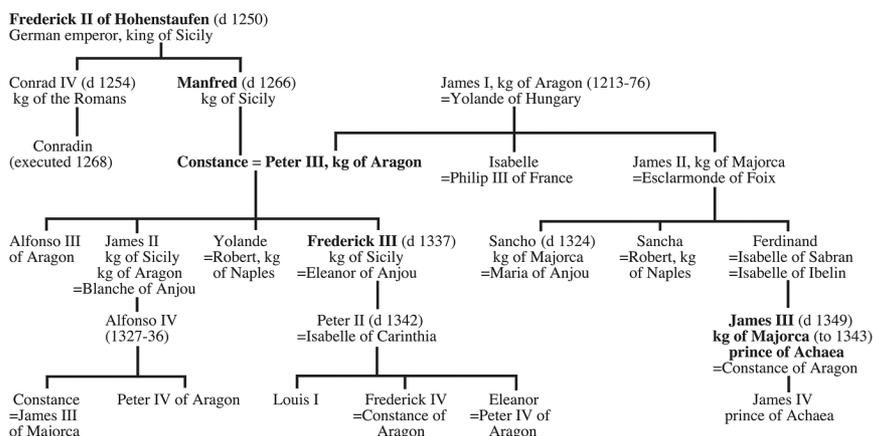


Table 2.

*The houses of Sicily, Aragon, and Majorca-Achaea.*

It was a conflict with which the young Giovanni Boccaccio would have been intimately familiar. In 1327, his father, Boccaccino di Chelino, was posted to the Naples branch of the Bardi bank—a key player in the dominance Florentines had come to exercise over the Neapolitan economy during the reign of Charles I’s grandson Robert the Wise (1309–43).<sup>36</sup> Though too insignificant to have left traces in contemporary records, young Giovanni is known to have been a friend of Nicola Acciaiuoli, scion of a prominent Florentine family and the protégé of Catherine of Courtenay, titular empress of Constantinople and the king’s widowed sister-in-law.<sup>37</sup> Between 1338 and 1343, Catherine was in the Morea to shore up her sons’ disputed claims—accompanied by the loyal Nicola, working on behalf of Acciaiuoli family interests. (Their intervention caused local Frankish barons to offer the overlordship of Achaea to John Cantacuzenos, the Byzantine Grand Domestic soon to proclaim himself emperor as John VI.)<sup>38</sup> In the interim, Edward III of England defaulted on some substantial loans, sending Florentine banking interests into collapse (1339). As most of the Florentine community of Naples pulled up stakes to return to their native city, Giovanni Boccaccio scrambled to find a patron whose protection would allow him to remain in the south. He penned poignant letters to his friend Nicola in the Morea, to Charles of Durazzo, and to a certain Pietro dallo Canigiano, later destined to figure in the *Decameron* as the “treasurer of my lady the empress of Constantinople.”<sup>39</sup> In 1340, Giovanni, his petitions

unanswered, reluctantly returned to Florence; the following year his friend Nicola, bearing honors and titles including the “baile de Morée,” returned to Naples via the port city of Chiarenza—Alatiel’s point of entry into the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>40</sup>

All but unlocatable on modern maps, Chiarenza (Clarentza, Glarenza) was the main port of the principality of Achaea—one of the two surviving Frankish colonies originally created in the wake of the Fourth Crusaders’ conquest of Constantinople in 1204.<sup>41</sup> In the first half of the fourteenth century, Achaea, the duchy of Athens, and the Byzantine empire were key pieces in a complex and ever-shifting kaleidoscope of power in which Angevins, Aragonese, “Franks,” Greeks, and Turks struggled for power in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>42</sup> During the first half of the fourteenth century, Achaea was for the most part in the Angevin sphere of influence, the duchy of Athens under Aragonese-Sicilian rule, and the empire “of Constantinople” restored (since 1261) to Byzantine control. In such an atmosphere, the tale of a “duke of Athens” who treacherously assassinates his “friend and kinsmen,” the prince of Romania, only to be betrayed by his brother-in-law, the son of the emperor of Constantinople, could hardly have escaped being read as thinly veiled political allegory.

But of what? In the first half of the fourteenth century, the political geography of this region was complicated by a set of titular pretenders to each title: Aragonese in Achaea, and French-affiliated Angevins in Athens and Constantinople (see table 3). This confusion, and the political rivalries toward which it gestures, make of the names featured in *Decameron* II.7 a set of floating signifiers that could, at the limit, be remixed in delirious or volatile combinations. Of the three fictional suitors, it is the prince of Morea whose behavior is most honorable.<sup>43</sup> Unlike many of Alatiel’s other suitors, he possesses her without treachery or violence: the relatives of the wounded Genoese shipowner send Alatiel to him. “The Prince saw that besides her beauty she had royal manners, and he guessed that she must be of noble birth (even though he was not otherwise able to learn who she was), and his love for her increased and become so great that he treated her more like his own wife than his mistress.” For her part, Alatiel “considered herself to be quite well off; as she was consoled she became cheerful again, and her beauty flowered to such an extent that all Romania seemed to be talking of nothing else” [di niuna altra cosa pareva che tutta la Romania avesse da favellare] (135; II.7.47)—a welcome respite, no doubt, from the political turmoil besetting mid-fourteenth-century Morea.

Trouble takes the form of the duke of Athens who, drawn by reports

	Princes of Achaea	Dukes of Athens	Emperors of Constantinople
<b>Actual</b>	1318-22 Robert of Naples 1322-33 John of Gravina 1333-64 Robert of Taranto	1312-17 Manfred of Sicily 1317-38 William of Sicily 1338-48 John of Sicily 1348-55 Frederick of Sicily	1282-1328 Andronicos II 1325-1341 Andronicos III 1341-1391 John V and 1347-1354 John VI Cantacuzenos
	King Robert the Wise of Naples, his brother, and nephew	three sons and the grandson of King Frederick III of Sicily	
<b>Titular or rival claimant</b>	1307 Margaret of Villehardouin 1313-15 Isabelle of Sabran 1316 Ferdinand of Majorca 1315-49 James III of Majorca	1311-56 Walter of Brienne	1308-46 Catherine de Courtenay 1346-64 Robert of Taranto
	a descendant of the Villehardouin princes, her daughter, son-in-law, and grandson	son of Walter I of Athens (killed 1311), brother-in-law of Robert of Taranto	the sister-in-law and nephew of King Robert the Wise of Sicily

*Table 3.*  
*Eastern Mediterranean rulers*  
*in the first half of the fourteenth*  
*century.*

of Alatiel's beauty, "arrived at Chiarenza with a numerous and honorable retinue and was received most nobly and most festively" (135). A few days into his visit, he ventures to ask his friend if Alatiel "was as marvelous a thing as people claimed" [*cosí era mirabil cosa come si ragionava*] (135; II.7.48). Told he might judge for himself, that evening he and his host sit down to dinner with Alatiel between them. Once again, Alatiel's thing-ness (obscured in Musa and Bondanella's more idiomatic translation) is insistently underscored:<sup>44</sup>

but they were not able to enjoy the pleasure of her conversation, for they understood little or nothing of her language; therefore, each of them stared at this marvelous creature [*maravigliosa cosa*]—especially the Duke, who could hardly believe that she was a mortal [*cosa mortale*]; and as he gazed at her, not realizing that with his eyes he was drinking the poison of love, thinking that he was merely satisfying his curiosity by looking at her, he found himself totally ensnared by her charms, and he fell deeply in love with her. After leaving the lady with the Prince and having had time to think things over, he came to the conclusion that the Prince was happier than any other man, having such a beautiful lady at his pleasure [*sí bella cosa al suo piacere*]. (135–36; II.7.50–51, emphasis added)

Ostensibly, this is a quintessential Orientalist moment, with the foreign woman cast as the object of the European male gaze. Yet as the passage unfolds, the “poison of love” [amoroso veleno] that the duke inadvertently drinks in with his eyes ominously echoes the poison [il veleno] that, in Panfilo’s introduction to tale II.7, people aspiring to riches and power are said to drink “in the gold chalices of royal banquets” [che nell’oro alle mense reali si beveva] (128; Intr., 4–5). At this princely table, Alatiel is, under the alchemy of the duke’s gaze, transmuted into the gold that tempts the unwary to drink. Poisoned, then, with love, the duke concocts an “evil plan” to assassinate the prince—his friend, relative, and host—tossing his lifeless body down onto the rocky coast below. Then, in a delicious reversal of the medieval trope of the substitutability of women, the duke, “his hands still bloody, . . . lay down beside the lady, and made love to her while she, half-asleep, mistook him for the Prince” (137).<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, when the prince’s body is discovered, his brother “called together his friends and relatives and vassals from various regions (including his brother-in-law Constanzio, son of the emperor of Constantinople) and without delay formed a very large and powerful army to wage war on the Duke of Athens” (138).

Above, we suggested that the political instability of fourteenth-century Romania created the potential for the constellation of proper names in tale II.7 to generate a plethora of overlapping and contradictory readings. Practically, of course, Boccaccio’s Angevin affiliations render some interpretations more plausible than others. Thus for a Florentine writing at the end of the 1340s, the “duke of Athens” would inevitably have conjured Walter of Brienne, husband of King Robert’s niece, Beatrice of Taranto. Son of the Burgundian duke of Athens who had lost his life and his dukedom to the Catalan Grand Company in 1311 (see table 4), Walter grew up determined to recover his lost patrimony.<sup>46</sup> In 1331, he launched an invasion of Athens—an expedition Pope John XXII sanctified as a crusade on the grounds that the Catalans were “schismatics, sons of perdition, and pupils of iniquity, devoid of all reason, and detestable.” A year later, having failed in his goals, Walter left Greece, never to return.<sup>47</sup> In 1342, as we have seen, he was named *signore* of Florence for life, supported by a broad coalition of “magnates eager to regain political influence, . . . bankers hoping to salvage their fortunes, and . . . artisans impoverished by the business depression.” Within months, however, his extravagance and harsh tax policies had alienated them all.<sup>48</sup> The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani described him as “cruel, cunning, avaricious, proud and dictatorial.”<sup>49</sup> In 1343, Walter was violently expelled from the city. Emotions ran high: during negotiations for his departure, two

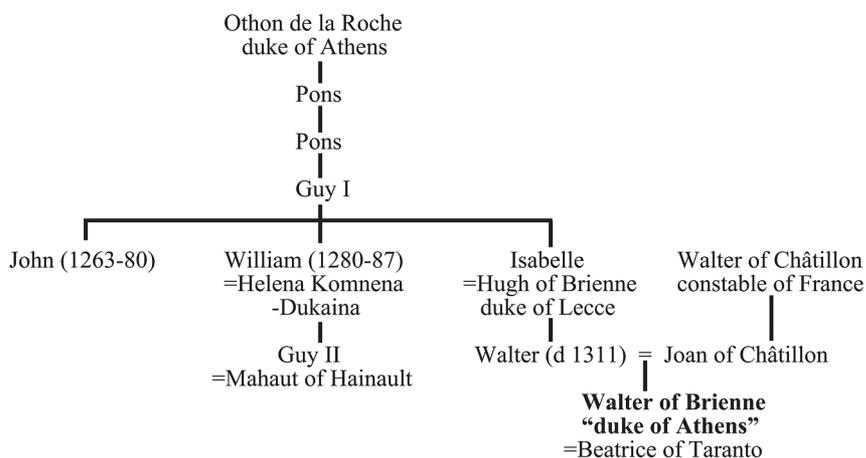


Table 4.

*The Burgundian dukes of Athens.*

hostages were “dismembered and torn to bits in an ecstasy of mob madness that ended in cannibalism”; later, two stonemasons were executed for writing a letter praising him and his administration.<sup>50</sup> At the turn of the 1350s, Walter’s short, turbulent stint as *signore* of Florence would still have been a vivid memory. For someone of Boccaccio’s connections, Walter would have represented the conjuncture where Angevin sympathies and Florentine interests, normally peacefully aligned, came into irrevocable conflict—figured, perhaps, as the betrayal and treachery of a “friend and relative” (134).

Alatiel’s beauty—previously responsible for the murders of a brother, a business partner, and a feudal “friend and relative”—now triggers a large-scale regional war that reads like some delirious version of Walter of Brienne’s failed 1331 campaign. To avenge his dead brother, the new prince of Morea attacks the duke of Athens, who is allied, in turn, with his brother-in-law Constanzio, the son of the emperor of Constantinople. Soon, however, Constanzio meets Alatiel and falls under her spell. Looking at her in amazement, he “told himself that he had never seen anything as beautiful as she and that one must certainly excuse the Duke, or anyone else, for using whatever treacherous means existed in order to possess such a beautiful creature” (138–39). Once again, desire for Alatiel produces a forgetfulness stronger than political exigency or family loyalty. Soon, Constanzio “completely abandon[s] all thought of war, giving himself over to thinking only about how he could take her from the Duke, and concealing with care his love from everyone” (139). Pleading illness, he withdraws from the fight

and, conveying Alatiel on board a “swift ship” with “oars . . . like wings” (139–40), sets sail—first to Aegina, then to the island of Chios.<sup>51</sup> At first Alatiel is disconsolate, but then, receiving “the same comfort from Constanzio as she had from the others before him, . . . began to enjoy what Fortune had prepared for her.”

### **The multicultural Mediterranean**

Moving from Athens to Aegina to Chios, Alatiel enters the southern Aegean world of islands and ports that, in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, had become an arena of intense competition, both *among* Latin powers and *between* them and the Turkish maritime emirates that had emerged from the disintegration of the Seljuk sultanate of Rum.<sup>52</sup> From this point on, the “diversi luoghi” of Alatiel’s adventures suggest the maritime routes of the Genoese (though they are never explicitly mentioned): in the early 1340s, for example, the Genoese ship carrying an English Franciscan to the Holy Land calls at Brindisi, Lecce, Corfu, Leucas, Chiarenza, Rhodes, Paphos, Famagusta, and Acre.<sup>53</sup> In the fourteenth century, Chios (Alatiel’s first stop) was a site of conflict between Byzantine and Genoese interests. Constanzio, the Greek emperor’s son, treats it as a place of refuge, but Fortune soon intervenes in the form of a Turkish maritime raid:

Osbech, who at that time was King of the Turks and constantly at war with the Emperor, came, by chance, to Smyrna; and when he heard how Constanzio was living such a lascivious life on Chios with some woman he had stolen and how he was taking no precautions to protect himself, he went there one night with some lightly armed ships and men; he quietly landed at Chios with his men, and took by surprise many of Constanzio’s men, who were still in their beds and unaware that the enemy was upon them; the others, those who did awaken, ran for their weapons and were killed; the entire city was burned, plunder and prisoners were placed aboard the ships, and all returned to Smyrna. (140)

Carried off as a war captive, Alatiel is on the verge of entering the world of Mediterranean slavery. Yet her fortunes soon take the opposite turn: “when [Osbech] understood that this was the one who had been taken while asleep in bed with Constanzio, he was most happy to see her; without further delay, *he made her his wife*, celebrated the wedding, and slept with her hap-

pily for a number of months” (140–41, emphasis added). Previously, Alatiel had always been honored as an almost-wife: Pericone had been willing to marry her “if she had no husband” (131); the prince of Morea had “treated her more like his own wife than his mistress” (135); the duke of Athens had favored her over his wife, the daughter of the emperor of Constantinople. Now she is actually married—her suitability as a wife unlinked from the question of her virginity: after all, having taken her in bed with Constanzio, Osbech can have no illusions on that score.

For Vittore Branca, the name “Osbech” evokes Uzbek, khan of the Golden Horde (1313–41), instrumental in promoting Genoa’s Black Sea trade and enjoying a favorable reputation in Florentine and Neapolitan mercantile circles.<sup>54</sup> In the 1340s, however, an attack on Chios launched from nearby Smyrna would have evoked not the khan of the Golden Horde but Umur Bey of Aydin—one of the *ghazi* emirates that sprung up on the Anatolian coast in the early fourteenth century, living by conquest and plunder.<sup>55</sup> An energetic military commander, Umur Bey captured Smyrna around 1329 from the Genoese adventurer Martin Zaccaria, making it his base for raiding the Byzantine coast and Venetian and Hospitaller interests in the Aegean archipelago.<sup>56</sup>

Umur’s exploits are dashingy evoked in the *Düstûrnâme*, a mid-fifteenth-century Ottoman chronicle recounting the history of the world from the Creation down to the reign of Mehmet II.<sup>57</sup> Book 18, composed in a vernacular Turkish not yet embellished by the Persian and Arabic elements characterizing later Ottoman court language, narrates the history of the emirate of Aydin from 1307 to 1348.<sup>58</sup> Among the adventures it recalls is an otherwise undocumented raid on the island of Chios:

Blood ran like a torrent;  
the mountain and plains were covered with bodies.  
They pillaged the island,  
seizing its people, their goods and fabrics.  
They didn’t leave a single fortress intact;  
everything was devastated; there were only lamentations.  
They took innumerable boys, virgins, and young women  
and gold and silver beyond reckoning. (321–28)<sup>59</sup>

Like Osbech, Umur returns to Smyrna to revel in the wealth he has captured:

The pasha returned to Izmir,  
having collected all this booty.  
[His elder brother] Hizir Beg came to Izmir, head held high,  
and met the pasha, that able man.  
He kissed the pasha on his two eyes,  
embraced him, pressed him to him, stroked his back,  
breathed in the perfume of his hyacinth [scented locks] and his  
sunny face;  
his beautiful words filled him with joy.  
Hizir Beg said to him: "O young man,  
tell me the tale of your exploits."  
The pasha told him everything that had happened.  
There were neither boundaries nor limits to his joy;  
there was no telling the richness of his booty.  
He gave him a gift of numerous moon-faced virgins,  
each one peerless—one of a thousand.  
He also gave him beautiful Frankish boys  
so he could untangle their locks.  
To these gifts, this man of great renown added  
gold, silver, and innumerable goblets.  
He kept a fifth of the booty and divided up the rest,  
distributing it to his entire army.  
The rich and the poor were overwhelmed:  
all were filled with joy. (331–54)

In 1344, however, Smyrna was recaptured by a naval league comprising Venice, the Hospitallers of Rhodes, Cyprus, and Genoa—a victory one historian calls "the most positive and lasting Christian success of the century."<sup>60</sup> Cut off from the sea, Aydin quickly lost its preeminence.

In Boccaccio's tale, Osbech becomes the target of a coalition not from Latin Europe but from the east: the emperor of Constantinople and King Basano of "Cappadocia" (in Central Anatolia). Riding out to "avoid being trapped" by these powers, however, Osbech is killed. Basano "began to advance toward Smyrna . . . and as he approached, everyone paid homage to him as the conqueror" (141). In the meantime, Alatiel falls into infidelity with Antioco, the "friend" and "faithful vassal" into whose care Osbech has consigned her. Unlike her previous lovers, he is "an old man" (141) with no discernible attractions.<sup>61</sup> Yet, as the narrator takes pains to specify, Antioco—

whose name suggests Greek origins or affiliations—“knew her language (something which pleased her very much, for she had been forced to live many years almost like a deaf mute, not understanding anyone and unable to make anyone understand her)” (141). So it happens that in just a few days, “forgetting about their lord who was away at war, they made their intimacy more passionate than friendly, enjoying each other most exquisitely between the sheets” (141). In a striking inversion of the courtly motif of the *mal-mariée*—the unhappy young wife who consoles herself for her marriage to an old, jealous husband by taking a handsome young lover—Alatiel, married to a bold young warrior, takes his elderly vassal to her bed. To the question, “What do women want?” Boccaccio (or Panfilo?) supplies the simple answer: a man who, literally, understands them.

After being consigned to silence for so long, Alatiel finally reenters a world in which people speak her language. Here, as Janet Lavarie Smarr observes, men not only treat her more kindly but treat one another more considerately as well: “The acts of violence end, and the men even ask her what she wishes to do.”<sup>62</sup> Fleeing Smyrna “with the greatest part of Osbech’s most valuable possessions” (141–42), Antioco takes Alatiel to Rhodes where they stay with his friend, a Cypriot merchant.<sup>63</sup> Soon after, Antioco falls ill. Feeling himself near death, he enjoins his friend to care for Alatiel, begs her “not to forget me after my death,” and dies, surrounded by “those two persons whom I love . . . more than any others in the world.” After burying Antioco, the merchant, “having concluded his business in Rhodes,” prepares to return to Cyprus; asked (for the first time in the story) what she wants to do, Alatiel decides to accompany him. Posing as husband and wife, the two embark on “a Catalan merchant ship which was already in port” (142). During the journey, “the dark, the comfort, and the warmth” of their shared bed enflame a passion that causes them to forget “their friendship and love for the dead Antioco.” By the time they reach the port of Paphos, they are sleeping together “as if they were married” (143).

Just what is this language shared by Alatiel, Antioco, and the Cypriot merchant? Antioco’s name, as we have noted, marks him as culturally Greek, yet he communicates as easily with his Turkish overlord, Osbech, as with Alatiel. His friend the “Cypriot merchant” is given no proper name: like the two “Genoese shipowners,” he is defined only by “nationality” and his role in the medieval Mediterranean economy. Given the complexity of fourteenth-century Cyprus—a Greek island ruled by a western prince, an entrepôt for merchants of many nations—the exact meaning of the term “Cypriot merchant” remains, we suggest, open to interpretation. What

seems clear is that here in the eastern (as opposed to the western) Mediterranean, linguistic difference—the distinction between those whose speech Alatiel understands and those she does not—can no longer be correlated with the religious distinction between Christians and Saracens.<sup>64</sup>

Fourteenth-century Cyprus was a site of ambivalence and accommodation. A Greek island under Latin rule since 1190, its fortunes had shifted dramatically after the Mamluk conquest of Acre (1291) robbed the crusaders of their last outpost in the Middle East and Latin Europeans in general of their commercial links with the Islamic world and beyond. Much of Acre's merchant community fled to Cyprus and—despite the papacy's frequently reiterated prohibition on all trade with the Mamluks—quickly turned the ports of Famagusta and Paphos into Latin Europe's new links to the markets of Syria.<sup>65</sup> The Levant trade was simply too valuable to everyone: the Genoese and the Venetians, who maintained extensive trade networks in Acre and Alexandria; the Mamluk Egyptians, dependent on Latin merchants for the import of war material and the export of local as well as long-distance commodities; Flemish wool producers and other western manufacturers eager to develop eastern markets for their goods.<sup>66</sup> Before long, the papacy itself was profiting handsomely from the sale of absolutions to merchants and whole nations for violating its own prohibitions against trade in Muslim lands.<sup>67</sup>

Cyprus's pivotal role in fourteenth-century trade made it a crossroads for ships and merchants of many nations, languages, and confessions. So it is no surprise to find Boccaccio's "Cypriot merchant" shuttling back and forth in "a Catalan merchant ship" between Paphos, Rhodes, and Armenia. Nor is it fortuitous that the man ultimately responsible for returning Alatiel to her home should be Antigono of Famagusta ("a nobleman," "old and very wise but rather poor") who had come to Paphos "on business." To judge by his name, Antigono, like Antioco, is surely Greek; yet he has served both the king of Cyprus, "grow[ing] poor" in the process (a poor reflection on the king, given the "spectacular commercial prosperity" Famagusta enjoyed for much of the fourteenth century), and the sultan of Babylon, among whose servants he had held "a position of no little importance" (143).<sup>68</sup>

The tale's dénouement turns on their chance encounter in the entrepôt city of Paphos. One day, when the merchant is away in Armenia on business, Antigono passes Alatiel's house. Recognizing him from her father's court, Alatiel sends for him and "timidly" asks "if he might not be Antigono of Famagusta" (143). Though he at first cannot place her, once she mentions Alexandria "he immediately recognize[s] her as Alatiel, the daughter of the Sultan, whom he believed to have died at sea" (144). Told that all Egypt

is convinced she is dead, Alatiel sighs, in the first words she is allotted in direct discourse: "I would have preferred for my life to have ended that way rather than to have led the life I have lived, and I think my father would wish the same thing if he ever found out about it" (144). Her discreet display of agency in summoning Antigono having brought about their bittersweet reunion, Alatiel accedes to language only to wish for her own death. For the princess of Babylon, the life she has been forced to live is a self-cancelling proposition.

For the resourceful Antigono, on the other hand, the cross-confessional world of Mediterranean exchange presents other possibilities. Taking Alatiel to court, he tells the king he "would do great honor to yourself and be of great help to me" by returning her to her father. Moved by "royal magnanimity," the king receives Alatiel "with great festivity and honor" (145) before sending her home to Babylon. After a joyous welcome, the sultan asks Alatiel "where she had lived for so long a time without ever sending word concerning her condition" (145); she responds with the elaborate cover story Antigono has prepared for her—that, shipwrecked near "a place called Aiguesmortes" and rescued from marauding peasants by four noblemen on horseback, she had been taken to the convent of San Cresci in Valcava, "organized by their religious laws," where she was "most kindly received and honored by the nuns" (146). As she acquired smatterings of their language, she feared revealing her identity lest she be driven away as "an enemy of their religion" (146), posing instead as the daughter of a Cypriot nobleman shipwrecked on her way to Crete to be married. The sympathetic abbess arranged her passage back to Cyprus with a party of French noblemen and women on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Disembarking at Paphos, she had spied Antigono—calling out to him "in our own language to welcome me as if I were his daughter" (147). Antigono adds that Alatiel's French escort had "spoke[n] very highly about the virtuous life she had led with the nuns and about her praiseworthy behavior." Thus the wayward princess is returned to her father as "the most beautiful, the most virtuous, and the most chaste daughter that any ruler who wears a crown today possesses" (148).

Bedeiled throughout most of her four-year adventure by her inability to communicate, Alatiel now fluently ventriloquizes Antigono's fabricated tale. Like her real adventures, her lie maps a Mediterranean itinerary gone awry—this time, from Cyprus to Crete (the traditional home of liars), rerouted by Fortune to a convent near the French port of Aigues-Mortes.<sup>69</sup> Had the sultan read his Boccaccio, he might not have found this part of the tale reassuring. In tale III.1, a handsome young peasant named Masetto,

posing as a deaf-mute, is employed as a gardener at a convent in the Florentine countryside “renowned for its sanctity” (194). Soon he is secretly sleeping with all eight nuns and the abbess, producing “a large number of little monks and nuns . . . without ever having to bear the expense of bringing up his children” (200). In tale IX.2, the abbess of a convent in Lombardy “very famous for its sanctity and religious spirit,” about to punish one of her nuns caught in *flagrante delicto* with her lover, is herself caught having a sexual liaison with a priest. Seeing that “there was no way to cover up her sin from the others,” the abbess “changed her tone,” asserting that “it was impossible for people to defend themselves from the desires of the flesh” and saying that “everyone there should enjoy herself whenever possible,” providing it were done discreetly (200). The sultan, however, takes the convent’s implied rectitude at face value: “extremely pleased to hear these things,” he rewards Antigono with “sumptuous gifts” and sends him back to Cyprus with expressions of “his deepest gratitude” for the king (146–48). As for Alatiel, her reward—eight men and ten thousand sex acts later—is to be married to the king of Algarve as if nothing had happened. Going to bed with the king “as if she were a virgin, . . . she made him believe that she still was one” (148), living happily ever after as his queen.

What are we to make of such a conclusion? Whatever modern readers may think of Alatiel’s marriage, it is clearly a “happy ending,” both by the values of the age and by the ruling theme of the Second Day—“people who after a series of misfortunes attain a state of unexpected happiness.” Our interpretation turns around the question of Alatiel’s virginity. On first being rescued by Pericone, Alatiel had advised her attendants never to reveal their identity and, “above all else, to preserve their chastity” (131). Yet in the end, the second part of her exhortation proves less important than the first: what she learns from Antigono is that, against all odds, having lost her chastity is less significant than having kept the secret of her identity. Perhaps we are meant to share a frisson of malicious delight at the duping of the credulous king who accepts the sexually experienced Alatiel as a virginal bride—our comic pleasure heightened when the victim involved is a Saracen. Or perhaps, in the aftermath of the great plague that must have strained many people’s ability to make sense of the world past its limit, we are simply left to ponder the paradox of a world in which virginity no longer defines a bodily, let alone a moral, state, but is reduced to a mere effect of reputation.

In Joan Ferrante’s reading of Alatiel, “the vast trading world of the Mediterranean” functions simply as “a large screen” on which to project “the story

of Florentine greed and business practices.”<sup>70</sup> In this article, we have tried to show, rather, the way *Decameron* II.7 conjures the Mediterranean as a space of hermeneutic indeterminacy, where the identity of the “duke of Athens” or the “emperor of Constantinople” depended on one’s political point of view, and where Alatiel’s cover story plays off the expectation that Christians would treat a lone Saracen girl as “an enemy of their religion” (146), even as it shows that same Saracen girl successfully passing as the daughter of a Cypriot nobleman. It conjures the Mediterranean as a place of both cross-confessional and interconfessional violence—each regulated more by the law of desire than the rule of ideology or principle—and of practical expediency, where Christian merchants routinely skirted prohibitions on Muslim trade in part by declining to specify their ships’ destinations.<sup>71</sup>

Most of all, the tale of Alatiel conjures the Mediterranean as a space of circulation and exchange. Viewed through the lens of modern sensibilities, Alatiel’s “thingness”—the product of her gender and her linguistic and cultural difference—can only signal her abjection. In the medieval Mediterranean, however, *belle cose* were the material support of a dense network of political, economic, and cultural exchanges.<sup>72</sup> These exchanges sometimes took some delirious turns: in the early fourteenth century, for example, the embassies that the Mamluk “sultan of Babylon” sent to his Christian allies and trading partners, the kings of Castile and Aragon, included gifts of Venetian cloth and Murano glass.<sup>73</sup> In the Mediterranean romance *Floire and Blancheflor* (the basis of Boccaccio’s *Filocolo*), the titular heroine’s upturn in fortune paradoxically begins when she is sold to some “merchants of Babylon” for a king’s ransom in gold, silver, and precious objects.<sup>74</sup> And, lest we should forget, Alatiel is not the tale’s sole beneficiary. In his happiness, the sultan

prayed God to grant him the grace to be able to reward properly whoever had honored his daughter, and especially the King of Cyprus for having honorably returned her to him; and some days later, he presented Antigono with sumptuous gifts and gave his leave to return to Cyprus, bringing with him to the King by letter and by special ambassadors his deepest gratitude for the great kindness he had shown to his daughter. (148)

Like his historical counterpart, this fictional king of Cyprus has everything to gain from the exchange of *belle cose* with the sultan of Babylon.

Finally, the tale of Alatiel concludes with the proverb, “A mouth that is kissed loses no flavor, but, like the moon, is renewed” (148). To the zero-sum world of fixed values, this proverb counterposes an alternate logic in which to take is in no way to diminish: the exchange value of virginity gives way to the use value of sexual pleasure.<sup>75</sup> For the men she meets on her travels, Alatiel’s desirability is never predicated on her virginity. Extracted from her place in the feudal politics of lineage, her worth resides in her beauty, not her (deferred) sexuality. In fact, when the ladies of the *brigata* breathe a collective sigh over Alatiel’s “various adventures,” the narrator suspects that “some of them sighed no less because of their longing for such frequent embraces than because of their compassion for Alatiel” (149).

Promiscuously probing some of the lesser-known corners of medieval Mediterranean history, we have tried, with every ounce of disciplinary skill at our disposal, to revivify some of the “lost, obliterated, or heavily overlaid” voices resonating just beneath the surface of the story of Alatiel. The payoff lies in the pleasure of recovering the vertiginous complexity of this world of circulation, accommodation, and exchange, this world “beyond the commune, beyond the region, beyond even Italy.”<sup>76</sup>



## Notes

- 1 On the overlapping issues of silence and female agency, see Laura Benedetti, “I silenzi di Alatiel,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 13.2 (1992): 245–55; Daniela Cavallero, “Alatiel e Zinevra: Il ‘peso’ di silenzio, la leggerezza dei ‘vestiti,’” *Romance Languages Annual* 11 (1998): 165–70; Manuela Marchesini, “Le ragioni di Alatiel (*Decameron* II.7),” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 257–76; and Millicent Marcus, “Seduction by Silence: A Gloss on the Tales of Masetto (*Decameron* III, 1) and Alatiel (*Decameron* II, 7),” *Philological Quarterly* 58.1 (1979): 1–15.
- 2 Steven M. Grossvogel, “Teaching the *Decameron* in a Historical Context,” in *Approaches to Teaching Boccaccio’s “Decameron,”* ed. James H. McGregor (New York: Modern Language Association, 2000), 63–69, drawing heavily on the work of Vitore Branca.
- 3 David Wallace, *Giovanni Boccaccio: Decameron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7. *Angevin* is the adjectival form referring to the French county of Anjou. In this context, it refers to the dynasty established in 1266 by Charles of Anjou, youngest brother of French king Louis IX, over the “Regno” of Naples and (until 1282), the island kingdom of Sicily.
- 4 Michel Balard, “A Christian Mediterranean: 1000–1500,” *The Mediterranean in History*, ed. David Abulafia (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 183–217, at 199,

- 201, 203, emphases added. The same time period is the subject of Janet Abu-Lughod's seminal work, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 5 The duchy of Athens was one of the Frankish states established in the wake of the Fourth Crusaders' conquest of the Byzantine Empire (1204). In 1311, Walter of Brienne, last in a line of Burgundian dukes, was overthrown and killed by the Grand Catalan company—mercenaries long active in Sicily and the eastern Mediterranean. Unable to govern on their own, the mercenaries turned the duchy over to Frederick III of Sicily, whose three sons—Manfred (1312–17), William (1317–38) and John of Randazzo (1338–48)—held the title “duke of Athens” in succession. Power was wielded by a series of vicars-general—most prominently, the king's illegitimate son, Alfonso Fadrique. Rule of Athens brought the Sicilians into conflict with both Naples and Venice. Meanwhile, the son of the last Burgundian duke, another Walter of Brienne, continued to style himself “duke of Athens.”
  - 6 Smyrna (Izmir) was an important port with a protected harbor off the Aegean coast of Anatolia. The Turks of Aydin captured its fortress in 1317 and its lower harbor (from the Genoese) in 1329. Its most illustrious ruler, Umur Bey, preyed on Latin maritime shipping. Smyrna was reconquered by a Christian coalition in 1344, thereafter coming increasingly under Hospitaller protection.
  - 7 David Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms, 1200–1500: The Struggle for Dominion* (London: Longman, 1997), xiii. On the modern underappreciation of the importance of the War of the Sicilian Vespers, see John H. Pryor, “The Naval Battles of Roger of Lauria,” *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983): 179–216, at 180. The kingdom of Naples was part of the kingdom of Sicily under the Normans (1130–89) and the Hohenstaufens (1189–1250). After the Sicilian Vespers (1282), when Sicily revolted against Charles I of Anjou and placed itself instead under Aragonese rule, southern Italy (the “Regno”) became a separate kingdom. Over the following two centuries, the Angevin kings of Naples were strongly allied with the papacy against the empire and Aragonese Sicily.
  - 8 Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron*, rev. ed. (Firenze: Sansoni, 1956), 140, our translation, emphasis added. A similar expansiveness characterizes the notes to Branca's magisterial edition, Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Torino: Einaudi, 1992). Italian quotations are cited from this edition parenthetically in the text by Day, tale, and paragraph numbers. English translations (modified where indicated) are taken from *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: Signet Classics/New American Library, 2002), cited by page numbers in the text.
  - 9 Joan Ferrante, for instance, gives a tour-de-force reading of Alatiel as an allegory of Florence, in “Politics, Finance, and Feminism in *Decameron* II, 7,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 21 (1993): 151–74.
  - 10 Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, trans. Richard Monges (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 279. This is from the translation of “Epopoea dei mercatanti,” the influential fifth chapter of Branca's *Boccaccio medievale*. Compare Cesare Segre's narratological analysis of *Decameron* II.7 in “Comical Structure in the Tale of Alatiel,” in his *Structures and Time: Narration, Poetry, Models*, trans. John

- Meddemmen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 122–35, at 135, where Segre considers the narrative’s spatial and temporal emplotting to reduce Alatiel’s wanderings and experiences around the Mediterranean, following her homecoming, to zero: “It is as if the four years had never been, as if the sea had closed over them as over a wake some thousands of leagues in length.”
- 11 On piracy, see Clifford R. Backman, *The Decline and Fall of Medieval Sicily: Politics, Religion, and Economy in the Reign of Frederick III, 1296–1337* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 269–85; on the Byzantine-Ottoman marriage, see Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 9; on the purchase of papal licenses, see Eliyahu Ashtor, “The Crisis of Levant Trade (1291–1344),” in *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3–63, at 38.
  - 12 David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 4.
  - 13 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); see also Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: British and French Orientalisms* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).
  - 14 On Mamluk Cairo, see Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 212–47; and André Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. Willard Wood (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 118–48. For western travelers’ accounts, see Anne Wolff, *How Many Miles to Babylon? Travels and Adventure to Egypt and Beyond, 1300 to 1640* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003).
  - 15 Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 267–81.
  - 16 Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. and trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (London: Henry Frowde, 1907), 76, cited in Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 107. Though Constable agrees that Benjamin’s list (which includes such sites as Ireland, Norway, Frisia, and Scotland, as well as India, Abyssinia, and Yemen) is exaggerated, she confirms his core assertion that “a number of western Christian merchant groups” had colonies and *fondacos* in Alexandria in this period. *Fondacos* were complexes comprising hostels and warehouse facilities for Christian traders in Muslim lands.
  - 17 Marco Tangheroni, “Trade and Navigation,” *Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. David Abulafia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127–46, at 132.
  - 18 Ashtor, “Crisis of Levant Trade,” 10.
  - 19 Among the sites this manual mentions are the Maghreb, Sicily, Montpellier, Genoa, Apulia, Constantinople, Negroponte/Euboea, Messina, Venice, and Aleppo. David Jacoby, “A Venetian Manual of Commercial Practice from Crusader Acre,” in *Studies on the Crusader States and on Venetian Expansion* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1989), 419.
  - 20 *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hibernia ad Terra Sanctum*, ed. Mario Esposito, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, vol. 4 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1960), 44–45.

- 21 John H. Pryor, however, cautions that traditional views on the decline of Muslim shipping in the central and high Middle Ages have been overstated. See his *Geography, Technology, and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649–1571* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 140–43.
- 22 The Italian says “Maiolica,” which Branca, *Decameron*, II.7.11, glosses as a small island north of Mallorca.
- 23 Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War*, 39, 91–92. We follow David Abulafia’s convention in *Western Mediterranean Kingdoms* of using “Majorca” to refer to the short-lived kingdom and “Mallorca” to refer to the largest of the Balearic islands. Under Muslim rule (10th–13th cent.), Mallorca served as a base for piratical raids on the coast of Languedoc and Provence. In 1229 it was conquered by James I of Aragon. Its capital, Ciutat de Mallorca, became a major entrepôt linking Genoa and Seville, gateway to the Atlantic routes to England and Flanders; especially important were its connections to North African ports where the Majorcans maintained consulates and warehouses. When James died in 1276, Majorca (along with Perpignan and Montpellier) was constituted as an autonomous kingdom for his younger son, James II. It survived until 1343, when Peter IV the Ceremonious seized it from his second cousin James III, incorporating it into the Crown of Aragon. In this period, Majorca emerged as an important center of cartography.
- 24 Abulafia, *Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, 128. Majorcan trade in Muslim lands was assured by treaties with Tunis (1271, 1278, 1313), Tlemcen (1313), Bougie (1302), and the Nasrid kings of Granada.
- 25 Unless we are meant to understand that, as the daughter of a Mamluk sultan of Kipchak Turkish origin, Alatiel would have been as ignorant of Arabic as of Romance.
- 26 *La fille du comte de Pontieu: Nouvelle du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Clovis Brunel (Paris: Champion, 1926), lines 272–79, our translation, emphasis added. See Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 183–86.
- 27 Marcus, “Seduction by Silence,” 8. Marcus reads II.7 as a cautionary tale against the destructive effects on the “polis” when Alatiel’s silence allows sexuality to fill the space of reason.
- 28 That the ship is privately owned clearly locates these characters in the maritime world of Genoa—in contrast to Venice with its state-organized fleets. Perhaps the “due giovani genovesi” (II.7.234) would have evoked the noble brothers Benedetto and Manuele Zaccaria, adventurers who in the first half of the fourteenth century made their fortune in the Aegean. Benedetto, in particular, earned a reputation for bravado in his great ship “auspiciously named *Divicia* (riches),” serving in turn as a naval commander for the Greek emperor, the kings of France, and the king of Castile. Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958–1528* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 178–79.
- 29 The two places were in fact historically linked in the person of James III of Majorca, whose mother was a direct descendant of the Villehardouin princes of Achaea (see table 2). His father, the Infante Ferdinand, had tried to conquer Achaea in 1315 but was killed the following year in battle. In 1348, the Franks of Morea tried, in vain, to enlist James III as their protector against Turkish maritime attacks. Nicho-

- las Cheetham, *Mediaeval Greece* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 144–45, 161.
- 30 On the *Decameron's* representation of the Genoese, see Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, 214. On Dante's representation of the Genoese, see Ferrante, "Politics, Finance, and Feminism," 155. David Wallace, *Premodern Places*, 187, emphasizes the way passage through Genoa "often opens out into storytelling scenarios of vast geographical compass."
  - 31 Jill Caskey, *Art and Patronage in the Medieval Mediterranean: Merchant Culture in the Region of Amalfi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. 4–7. Her study examines lay patronage on the Amalfi coast in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—particularly by the Rufolo family of Ravello, one of whose members is fictionalized by Boccaccio in *Decameron* II.4. See also Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 156.
  - 32 Marchesini, "Le Ragioni di Alatiel," 268; our trans.
  - 33 The footnote in the Norton critical edition—that as Boccaccio composed *The Decameron*, the Morea "was being contested by the Venetian republic, the Byzantine empire, and the Turks" (51 n. 4)—is somewhat misleading. According to Anthony Luttrell, Venice began actively intervening in the Morea only from 1380, after the collapse of Angevin power. Before that, Venice "si rifiutò costantemente di aiutare gli Angioini nei loro tentativi di recuperare il Ducato di Atene usurpato dai Catalani." See "Venezia e il Principato di Acaia: secolo XIV," *Studi Veneziani* 10 (1968): 407–14, at 409; repr. in *Latin Greece, the Hospitallers, and the Crusades, 1291–1440* (London: Variorum, 1982).
  - 34 This is the daughter to whom Manfred refers in the famous passage from *Purgatorio* III.112–45.
  - 35 This is the Guelf-Ghibelline struggle that features so prominently in Dante's *Inferno*. Its roots went back to the Investiture Controversy of the eleventh century, but it gathered momentum in the thirteenth from competing territorial ambitions of pope and emperor during the long reign of Frederick II (1197–1250).
  - 36 By the following year, Boccaccio was head of the Bardi Naples office. Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, 4, 11. During this period, Gene Brucker writes, Naples was to Florence "what India was to be for England 500 years later." Gene A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 54. See also Abulafia, *Western Mediterranean Kingdoms*, 152–53, citing Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, 16–76.
  - 37 Nicola's great-grandfather Bartolomeu had served Charles I as "portulan et procureur du fisc en Sicile" while marketing precious textiles to the queen, Countess Beatrice of Provence. E.-G. Léonard, *Boccace et Naples: Un poète à la recherche d'une place et d'un ami* (Paris: Droz, 1944), 10–11. His father, Acciaiuolo, was King Robert's chamberlain and counselor.
  - 38 George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, rev. ed., trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 510.
  - 39 Léonard, *Boccace et Naples*, 24–26.
  - 40 *Ibid.*, 27. Nicola's will, drafted in 1347, included bequests to the Franciscans and Dominicans of Chiarenza. See Anthony Luttrell, "The Latins of Argos and Naulia: 1311–1394," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 34 (1966): 34–55, at 37; repr. in *Latin, Greece, the Hospitallers, and the Crusades*.

- 41 Achaea was ruled by the descendants of its co-founder, Geoffrey of Villehardouin (nephew of the famous chronicler). In the fourteenth century, Achaea was ruled successively by Isabelle's daughter Mahaut of Hainault and her husband, Louis of Burgundy (1313–21); John of Gravina (1322–1346), another of King Robert's brothers; and, as the *Decameron* was being composed, by Philip of Taranto's son Robert (1346–1364).
- 42 See *The Atlas of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 87, 137–41, 146–47.
- 43 For Joan Ferrante, "Politics, Finance, and Feminism," 156–57, the fictional duke's "recent historical counterpart" is "Gianni [John of Gravina], brother of King Robert of Naples, [who] accompanied Robert's son, Charles, Duke of Calabria, to Florence, when he became lord of Florence in 1325; in Robert's service he led armies against the emperor Louis of Bavaria."
- 44 Benedetti, "I silenzi di Alatiel," 251.
- 45 In the *Tristan* legend, Iseult's maid Brangien takes her mistress's place in her marriage bed, lest King Mark notice that his bride is not a virgin; in Marie de France's "Guigemar," when the title character is reunited with his great love after an enforced separation, he at first doubts it is she: "Is this my sweet friend? my hope? my heart? my life? . . . I'm sure it isn't she: women look a lot alike [Femmes se ressemblent asez]—my thoughts are troubled over nothing." *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Champion, 1983), lines 773–80.
- 46 The Grand Catalan Company was a band of mercenaries employed by Frederick III of Sicily in his wars against Angevin Naples. Later they were employed by Byzantine emperor Andronicos II in his wars against the Turks, then by Duke Walter of Athens. In both cases, however, they turned against their employers: when Walter tried to dismiss them without paying the agreed-upon compensation, they slaughtered him and the Burgundian nobility of Athens at the battle of Cephissos in 1311. Soon they turned official control of the duchy over to Frederick III, who installed his son as the new duke of Athens. Meanwhile, the Catalans—along with the Turks—had emerged as powerful new players in the fourteenth-century Mediterranean, their principal livelihood coming from piracy rather than trade or agriculture.
- 47 Kenneth M. Setton, "The Catalans in Greece, 1311–1380," in *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 3, ed. K. M. Setton and H. W. Hazard (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 167–284, at 189–91.
- 48 Gene A. Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343–1378* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 7. Walter had previously commanded Florence's troops in her war against Lucca.
- 49 Luttrell, "Latins of Argos and Naulia," 35.
- 50 Ruggiero, *Florence in the Age of Dante*, 20; Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 10, 73, 109. Walter's expulsion was an international incident. In retaliation, King Philip VI expelled all Florentine merchants living and trading in France. The Florentines, for their part, never again chose a foreign *signore*. In 1344 Walter became a Venetian citizen. He fought at Crécy in 1346 and, having been made a Constable of France, died at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, "the last of his line." See Luttrell, "Latins of Argos and Naulia," 34; and Setton, "Catalans in Greece," 189–91.

- 51 The port city of Aegina was a refuge for pirates from at least the twelfth century until it was ruled, after 1311, by the dukes of Athens. The Aegean island of Chios was economically important as a source of mastic. In 1305 the Byzantines ceded it to the Genoese adventurer Benedetto Zaccaria to defend from Ottoman and Catalan incursions but in the 1320s took it back again, depriving Genoa and the Zaccarias of an important eastern outpost. In 1346 a group of Genoese shipowners engineered its reconquest, financing the campaign in exchange for the right to administer and profit from the island possession for twenty years.
- 52 Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War*, 8. Meanwhile, in the northern Aegean, the Ottomans were launching raids on the Byzantine coast, leading to alliances between Andronicos III and the emir of Aydin (Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 507).
- 53 Two decades earlier, another Franciscan, the Anglo-Irish Simon FitzSimon, had sailed from Venice to Alexandria on a ship that made intermediate stops at Pola, Zara, Ragusa, Durazzo, Methone, and Candia (in Crete).
- 54 Vittore Branca, “L’epopea dei mercatanti,” in *Boccaccio medievale*, rev. ed. (Firenze: G. C. Sansone, 1970), 147 n. 1. The westernmost outpost of the Mongol empire, the khanate of the Golden Horde was established ca. 1240 with the great raids that terrorized Christian Europe, reaching as far as the Hungarian plain. On the Mongols’ impact on the Latin imaginary, see Peter Jackson, “Christians, Barbarians, and Monsters: The European Discovery of the World Beyond Islam,” *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), 93–110.
- 55 The emirate of Aydin was one of the short-lived autonomous principalities (*beyliks*) to emerge from the disintegration of the Seljuk sultanate of Rum (1243) after the Mongol invasions. Founded as marcher states, these *beyliks* lived and thrived on frontier warfare in the Anatolian interior. In the fourteenth century, Aydin was among the *beyliks* that made “an explosive entry into the Aegean world,” raiding Byzantine and Latin ports. Its most noteworthy ruler was Umur Bey (1334–48). After his death it lost its importance and was annexed by the Ottomans in 1425/6.
- 56 See entries for “Aydin-oghlu” and “Ghazi” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–), 1:783 and 2:1043–45, respectively. Umur Bey was a close ally of Constantinople. In 1335 he joined Andronicos III’s alliance against the Latins. During the Byzantine civil war of 1341–47, he was so closely allied with John VI Cantacuzenos that one Byzantine chronicler compared them to Orestes and Pylades. See entries on “Smyrna” and “Umur Beg” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3:1919–20, 2141.
- 57 The *Düstûrnâme* was composed by Enveri and probably commissioned by the grand vizier Mahmud Pasha (served 1453–56 and 1472–73). Books 1–17 describe the ruling dynasties of Persia down to the Mongols; Books 19–22 recount the history of the Ottomans down to 1464. The first two-thirds of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ancien fonds turc 250 is written on paper of Genoese manufacture. Book 18 comprises about a third of the whole. *Le Destân d’Umûr Pacha*, ed. and trans. Irène Mélikoff-Sayar (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), 24–25, 28–29. Quotations from this edition are given parenthetically in the text, with our translations from the French.
- 58 The collapse of the Seljuk sultanate of Rum (whose court language was Persian)

- brought a return to the Turkish vernacular. Umur Pasha sponsored translations of *Kalila wa Dimna* and other texts into Turkish prose.
- 59 Paul Lemerle dates the raid to late 1329 or early 1330, in the wake of Martin Zaccaria's departure from the island. *L'Emirat d'Aydin, Byzance et l'Occident: Recherches sur "La Geste d'Umur Pacha"* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 59–62.
  - 60 Anthony Luttrell, "The Crusade in the Fourteenth Century," in *Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. J. H. Hale et al. (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 142; and Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1305–1578: From Lyons to Alcazar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56–61. Two years later, the coalition broke apart, as Genoa seized Chios again for itself. Umur Bey died in 1348.
  - 61 Compare Pericone, "a very robust, bold looking man" (131); his brother Manato, twenty-five years old, "handsome, and as fresh as a rose" (131); the "handsome and brave" young duke of Athens (135); and Osbech, "a young man" himself (140).
  - 62 Janet Levarie Smarr, "Non-Christian People and Spaces in the *Decameron*," in McGregor, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Boccaccio's "Decameron"*, 31–38, at 33.
  - 63 An island in the Aegean Sea, from ca. 1310 Rhodes was the headquarters of the military order of the Knights of the Hospital, from which they launched crusades against the Turks and the Mamluks and seized Christian vessels trading with the Muslims in violation of papal prohibitions. It became an important emporium, naval base, and banking center. It was also a center for the slave-trade for both the Genoese (exporting slaves from the Aegean and Black Sea regions to the Mamluks) and the Venetians (exporting Greek slaves from the Morea).
  - 64 Thus Smarr's assertion that civilized behavior "lies in the land of the *other*, while *Christians* are full of treachery, murder, lust, and disregard for the institutions of the church" ("Non-Christian People," *ibid.*, 33, emphasis added) rests on an untenable distinction based on religious difference.
  - 65 Ashtor, "Crisis of the Levant Trade," 39–41.
  - 66 Genoese business was particularly threatened: before the fall of Acre, their Black Sea route connecting the Crimean port of Caffa (via Syria) to Alexandria was a major axis of international trade, supplying the slaves as well as the grain crucial to the Mamluk regime (*ibid.*, 10–12). The Mamluks were manumitted slaves, acquired as children and reared as an elite corps of soldiers and administrators. In principle, the regime reproduced itself not through inheritance but through the constant importation of new generations of slaves. In another example of Genoese reliance on Egyptian trade, the port city of Tinnis was the main market for mastic—the resin that made control of Chios so valuable. See Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 79. By the fourteenth century, Egypt and the Muslim Levant were becoming crucial markets for the export of Latin European foodstuffs and such manufactured commodities as paper and soap (Ashtor, "Crisis of the Levant Trade," 24–25). On the export of Italian paper (mainly from the areas around Venice and Genoa) to Muslim lands in the fourteenth century, see Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 211–12.
  - 67 Ashtor, "Crisis of the Levant Trade," 17–19. Acre's continuing importance as a commercial center under Muslim rule is recalled in *Decameron* II.9, where the sultan of

- Alexandria sends his trusted servant Sicurano (the cross-dressed wife of a Genoese merchant) to the “great trade fair, a great gathering of *both Christian and Saracen merchants*, . . . in order to guarantee the protection of the merchants and their goods [along with] enough soldiers . . . to stand guard” (174, emphasis added).
- 68 See W. Edbury, “Famagusta in 1300,” in *Cyprus and the Crusades*, ed. Nicholas Coureas and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Center, 1995), 337–53, at 337. The king of Cyprus likewise comes off poorly in *Decameron* I.9 as being ineffectual and weak.
- 69 Founded in the 1240s by Louis IX to give France a port on the Mediterranean, Aigues-Mortes soon grew into a cosmopolitan port dominated by the Genoese, who used it to transport goods to and from the trade fairs of Champagne. It enjoyed its greatest prosperity in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; after that it began to silt up, leading to its economic decline.
- 70 Ferrante, “Politics, Finance, and Feminism,” 163.
- 71 Ashtor, “Crisis of Levant Trade,” 41.
- 72 See Eva R. Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century,” *Art History* 24.1 (2001): 17–50; Oleg Grabar, “Patterns and Ways of Cultural Exchange,” in *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss and Christine Verzár Bornstein (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 441–46; and Anthony Cutler, “Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies,” *Dumbarton Oaks* 55 (2001): 247–78.
- 73 Ashtor, “Crisis of Levant Trade,” 25.
- 74 The tale is first attested in Old French in the mid–twelfth century. See Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, 77–104. For a survey of variants, see Patricia E. Grieve, “*Floire and Blancheflor*” and the European Romance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 75 Compare the twelfth-century troubadour William IX of Aquitaine’s “leis de con” [the law of the cunt]: “as other things diminish when you take from them, cunt increases [en creis] . . . as the wood is cut, the thicker it grows. . . . A man is wrong to cry damaged goods when there is no loss.” *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères*, trans. Frederick Goldin (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1973), 22–25.
- 76 The first quotation reprises our epigraph, from David Wallace’s *Premodern Places*, 4; the second reprises the passage from Vittore Branca’s *Boccaccio medievale*, 140.

