

Imagined Travels and Neoplatonic Pilgrimage in Petrarch's 'Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri Yehsu Cristi'


Abstract Petrarch's 'Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri Yehsu Cristi' (1358) is noteworthy among late medieval travel and pilgrimage literature for its unusual features, such as its epistolary form, its detailed descriptions of Italian antiques, and its author never actually having visited the Holy Land. However, by comparison with other works from the same period, such as the similarly structured letter dealing with the famous ascent of Mount Ventoux ('Ad familiares' 4.1) as well as 'De otio religioso', it can be demonstrated that Petrarch combines elements of pilgrimage literature and Neoplatonic philosophy in order to make a statement about the relationships between classical learning, Christian faith, and the human soul's spiritual journey to God.

Zusammenfassung Petrarca's 'Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri Yehsu Cristi' (1358) ist aufgrund seiner ungewöhnlichen Merkmale – der Briefform, der detaillierten Beschreibung italienischer Altertümer und des Autors selbst, der nie das Heilige Land besucht hat – ein Sonderfall innerhalb der spätmittelalterlichen Reise- und Pilgerliteratur. Im Vergleich mit anderen Werken aus derselben Schaffensphase wie dem ähnlich aufgebauten Brief über die berühmte Besteigung des Mont Ventoux („Ad familiares“ 4.1) sowie ‚De otio religioso‘ lässt sich jedoch nachweisen, dass Petrarca bewusst Elemente der Pilgerliteratur und der neuplatonischen Philosophie kombiniert, um über die Beziehungen zwischen klassischem Lernen, christlichem Glauben und der spirituellen Reise der menschlichen Seele zu Gott zu reflektieren.

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1 Introduction

Within the genre of medieval pilgrimage texts,¹ Petrarch's 'Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri Iehsu Cristi' presents, in many respects, a special case.² In the words of Susanna FISCHER:

[w]ährend sonst in den lateinischen Pilgertexten bis ins 15. Jahrhundert Erwähnungen antiker Stätten oder mythologischer Ereignisse und Personen eine Ausnahmeerscheinung sind, beschreibt Petrarca in seinem *Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri* (1358), das nicht auf einer tatsächlichen Reise basiert, eine Reise durch eine Welt voller Spuren der Antike und stellt so einen Sonderfall innerhalb der Gattung der Pilgertexte dar.³

Some of these peculiarities may be down to the circumstances of the text's creation, which are outlined in the first paragraphs of the text.⁴ Accordingly, Petrarch wrote the 'Itinerarium' in April 1358 for his friend Giovanni Mandelli, then *podestà* of Bergamo and originating from an influential Milanese family. Mandelli planned to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and had suggested that Petrarch accompany him. Petrarch refused out of fear of the sea (*pelagi metus*),⁵ but wrote the 'Itinerarium' in the manner of a letter to his friend as a substitute for his own company. By

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- 1 For the term and concept of 'pilgrimage texts' see Susanna FISCHER, *Erzählte Bewegung: Narrationsstrategien und Funktionsweisen lateinischer Pilgertexte (4.–15. Jahrhundert)* (Mittellateinische Studien und Texte 52), Leiden, Boston 2019, pp. 7–8.
 - 2 This long-neglected text has found more attention among students of Petrarch in recent years; an overview of the scholarship is given in Chiara ABATERUSSO, 'Ingrediamur vero iam tandem iter'. Per una rassegna di studi sull'*Itinerarium*, in: *Petrarchesca* 7 (2019), pp. 149–158. Modern editions and translations: Francesco Petrarca, *Itinerario in Terra Santa* (1358), ed. by Francesco LO MONACO, Bergamo 1990 (with facing Italian translation); Francesco Petrarca, *Reisebuch zum Heiligen Grab*. Lateinisch/Deutsch, ed. by Jens REUFSTECK, Stuttgart 1999 (with facing German translation). Petrarch's Guide to the Holy Land. Itinerary to the Sepulcher of our Lord Jesus Christ. With an Introductory Essay, Translation, and Notes, ed. by Theodore CACHEY, Notre Dame 2002 (with facing English translation); Pétrarque, *Itinéraire de Gênes à la Terre Sainte*, 1358, ed. by Christophe CARRAUD, Grenoble 2002 (with facing French translation); and now Francesco Petrarca, *Guida al viaggio da Genova alla Terra Santa: Itinerarium Syriacum*, ed. by Ugo DOTTI, Milan 2018 (with facing Italian translation). In the following article, I generally follow the edition of REUFSTECK, but use the medieval orthography found in the manuscripts and employed by LO MONACO.
 - 3 FISCHER (note 1), p. 20 ("While otherwise in Latin pilgrimage texts up to the 15th century references to ancient sites or mythological events and people are an exception, Petrarch in his *Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri* [1358] describes a journey through a world full of traces of antiquity which is not based on an actual journey and thus represents a special case within the genre of pilgrimage texts"). My own translation.
 - 4 As is often the case in Petrarch, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that this information may be (partly) fictitious as well.
 - 5 Metapoetic connotations may be intended, cf. Attilio GRISAFI, 'Nulla causa potentior quam pelagi metus': paure metaletterarie e altre riflessioni sull'*Itinerarium* di Francesco Petrarca, in: *Itineraria* 7 (2008), pp. 73–85.

choosing the epistolary form, Petrarch makes use of a traditional rhetorical topos: both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, letters are typically considered “half a conversation” and a means of lending presence to absent friends.⁶ Petrarch himself expresses this topos in the following words:

Nichilominus te animo comitabor et, quoniam ita vis, his etiam comitabor scriptis, que tibi brevis itinerarii loco sint. Morem enim secutus amantium, cuius presentia cariturus es, imaginem flagitasti, qua utcunque tuam absentiam solareris, non hanc vultus imaginem, cuius in dies mutatio multa fit, sed stabiliorem effigiem animi ingeniique mei, que, quantulacunque est, profecto pars mei optima est. Hic tibi ergo non amici domicilium corpus hoc, quod videntes quidam totum se hominem vidisse falso putant, sed amicum ipsum internis spectare luminibus licebit, quoniam, ut ait Cicero, mens cuiusque est quisque, non ea figura que digito demonstrari potest.⁷

Nevertheless, I will accompany you in the mind, and if you like, also in this text, which shall be a little itinerary for you. For in the way of lovers you have requested a picture of the man whose presence you will be missing, in which you can find consolation during your absence as far as possible – not a picture of the face, which changes a lot over time, but the more enduring picture of my mind and intellect, which is indeed, as little as it is, the best part of myself. Therefore, you may not look at this body as the abode of your friend, of which some erroneously think that they have seen the whole man when they see it. Instead, you may look at your friend himself with your inner eyes. For each man’s mind is the man himself, as Cicero says, not the body which can be pointed at with a finger.

Accordingly, Petrarch’s text reflects his mind and thus is an appropriate substitute for personal conversations during the trip. This idea motivates the use of the epistolary setting as a conscious literary device which, at least in its elaborateness, is unusual for pilgrimage literature.⁸ However, the quoted paragraph also contains an

6 E.g. [Pseudo-]Demetrios, ‘De elocutione’ 222–235; Gregory of Nazianzus, Letter 51; Iulius Victor, ‘De arte rhetorica’ 27; Cicero, ‘Epistulae ad Atticum’ passim; Hieronymus, Letter 29.1; Ruricius of Limoges, Letter 2.51; Adalbertus Samaritanus, ‘Praecepta dictaminum’ §1 (= Adalbertus Samaritanus, *Praecepta dictaminum*, ed. by F.-J. SCHMALE [MGH QQ zur Geistesgesch. 3], Weimar 1961, pp. 32–33); cf. Heikko KOSKENNIEMI, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.*, Helsinki 1956, pp. 23–47; Klaus THRAEDE, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Briefftopik*, Munich 1970, passim; Michaela ZELZER, *Der Brief in der Spätantike. Überlegungen zu einem literarischen Genos am Beispiel der Briefsammlung des Sidonius Apollinaris*, in: *Wiener Studien* 107/108 (1994/95), pp. 541–551.

7 Petrarch, ‘Itinerarium’ 7. All translations from Latin are my own.

8 In fact, there are some other letters with embedded pilgrimage narratives, which may have served as an (additional) inspiration for Petrarch, e.g. Jerome, Letter 108 (to Eustochium); Eucherius,

epistemological assessment of perception, which will grow into an important theme of the text. External visual perception, according to Petrarch, does not suffice in giving a complete picture of another person; one must use their *interna lumina*, their “inner eyes”, in order to truly see.⁹

This epistemological proposition also serves to legitimize other distinctive features of the text: Petrarch belongs to the group of ‘armchair pilgrims’ who had not travelled the Holy Land themselves, but who relate the oral account of some informant or construct their work from written sources.¹⁰ Then again, both the title and the first paragraphs of the ‘Itinerarium’ make clear that Petrarch wanted his fictional travelogue to be read and used as a guide for actual pilgrimage. Indeed, Petrarch defends this seemingly paradoxical approach with an argument difficult to refute:

*Poscis ergo, vir optime, quoniam me non potes, comites has habere literulas, in quibus que oculis ipse tuis mox videbis ex me, qui ea certe necdum vidi omnia nec unquam forte visurus sum, audire expetis: mirum dictu, nisi quia passim multa que non vidimus scimus, multa que vidimus ignoramus.*¹¹

So, you request from me these little writings as your companions, because you cannot take me myself with you. In them you wish to hear something about things you will soon see yourself with your own eyes from me, who has not seen them all yet and may never see them: this would be odd to say, except that we frequently know many things we have not seen, and do not know many things we have seen.

Petrarch thus engages with central themes of both pilgrimage literature and medieval epistemology: vision and visualization, perception and memory, *oculi externi* and *oculi mentis*. First, medieval pilgrims do not typically experience the places they visit through just their physical sensations; instead, they commemorate, visualize, and sometimes even re-enact biblical events associated with each site. Most notably, however, these spiritual practices are usually described as ‘seeing’ with internal eyes

‘De situ Hierusolimae epistula ad Faustum presbyterum’; and Egeria, ‘Peregrinatio’. For different reasons, however, none of them really matches Petrarch’s handling of the epistolary setting.

9 The importance of vision in Petrarch is briefly discussed by Paolo RIGO, ‘Tra viaggio reale e topoi narrativi nell’ *Itinerarium ad sepulcrum Domini nostri Iesu Christi* di Francesco Petrarca, in: Andrea GIMBO, Mattea Claudia PAOLICELLI and Alessandro RICCI (eds.), *Viaggi, itinerari, flussi umani. Il Mondo attraverso narrazioni, rappresentazioni e popoli*, Rome 2013, pp. 255–266, here p. 265.

10 ‘Armchair pilgrims’ include writers such as Adomnán, Bede, and Petrus Diaconus. While Petrarch does not regularly name his sources and shies away from overly overt intertextual allusions, at least his use of Jerome for depicting Bethlehem (in ‘Itinerarium’ 62–63) – as well as of Pomponius Mela and Plinius for the geography of the Mediterranean – can be sufficiently demonstrated, cf. the commentary of LO MONACO (note 2), pp. 91–119.

11 Petrarch, ‘Itinerarium’ 9.

(*oculi mentis, oculi fidei*).¹² An early and influential account of them is given by Jerome, who actively promoted pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the assurance that one “could simultaneously see the physical present and the biblical past in one place.”¹³ For these spiritual interactions with the holy places, vision alone is not sufficient, but needs to be complemented by the knowledge of each location’s role in salvation history. The uninitiated would indeed, to use Petrarch’s words, not know what they have seen, and even not see what they could see if they knew.

Second, the experience of pilgrimage was not confined to pilgrims actually travelling to the Holy Land, but could also be reproduced by imaginary ‘armchair pilgrimage’.¹⁴ While ultimately going back to Augustinian theory of perception, the medieval *locus classicus* concerning the reader’s imagination may be found in Alcuin’s ‘De Animae Ratione ad Eulalam Virginem’:¹⁵ *Et adhuc mirabilis est, quod incognitarum rerum, si lectae vel auditae erunt in auribus, anima statim format figuram ignotae rei* (“And what is even more wonderful, the mind instantly forms an image of unknown things, if they are read or heard with the ears”).¹⁶ Several authors of pilgrimage narratives advertise that readers can use their texts not only

12 One of the most evocative confrontations of *oculi fidei* and *oculi corporis* can be found in the ‘Liber peregrinationis’ of Riccoldo of Monte Croce where Riccoldo describes his experience at the Holy Sepulchre: *Circumspiciens autem sollicite si vere viderem Dominum meum oculis corporeis pendentem in cruce, non vidi nisi oculis fidei; oculis autem corporis vidi locum crucifixionis et saxum conscissum a summo usque deorsum* (“Carefully, I looked around if I could really see my Lord hanging from the cross with my physical eyes, but I only saw him with the eyes of faith; with the eyes of my body, however, I saw the place of the crucifixion and the rock cleft in two from top to bottom”), Riccoldo of Monte Croce, *Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient. Texte latin et traduction. Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d’Acre. Traduction*, ed. by R. KAPPLER (Textes et traductions des classiques français du Moyen Âge 4), Paris 1997, p. 62.

13 The wording is from Philip BOOTH, *Seeing the Saviour in the Mind’s Eye: Burchard of Mount Sion’s Physical and Spiritual Travels to the Holy Land, c. 1274–1284*, in: Jennifer HILLMAN and Elizabeth TINGLE (eds.), *Soul Travel. Spiritual Journeys in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Stuttgart 2019, pp. 181–205, here p. 189. See Jerome, Letter 46.5 and 13 (to Marcella); Letter 108.10 (to Eustochium). Jerome’s visualizations of the Holy Sepulchre and of the nativity scene in Bethlehem have often been echoed by later pilgrims. Cf. also FISCHER (note 1), pp. 66–73 and pp. 110–115.

14 Influential works on imaginary pilgrimage include Kathryn BEEBE, *Reading Mental Pilgrimage in Context: The Imaginary Pilgrims and Real Travels of Felix Fabri’s ‘Die Sionpilger’*, in: *Essays in Medieval Studies* 25 (2008), pp. 39–70; Susanne LEHMANN-BRAUNS, *Jerusalem sehen: Reiseberichte des 12. bis 15. Jahrhunderts als empirische Anleitung zur geistigen Pilgerfahrt*, Freiburg i. Br. 2010; Kathryn M. RUDY, *Virtual Pilgrimage in the Convent: Imagining Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2011; Kathryn BEEBE, *Pilgrim and Preacher: The Audiences and Observant Spirituality of Friar Felix Fabri (1437/8–1502)*, Oxford 2014; Kathryn BEEBE, *The Jerusalem of the Mind’s Eye: Imagined Pilgrimage in the Late Fifteenth Century*, in: Bianca KÜHNEL, Galit NOGA-BANAI and Hanna VORHOLT (eds.), *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, Turnhout 2014, pp. 409–420; see also Kathryn BEEBE in this volume.

15 PL 101, 642A–C. In Augustine, important texts are Letter 7 (to Nebridius) and ‘De genesi ad litteram’ 12.23. For a detailed discussion see FISCHER (note 1), pp. 66–81 with further references.

16 PL 101, 642B.

as a practical guide for travelling the Middle East, but also for imaginary travel and for visualizing biblical sites while reading.¹⁷ In his 'Itinerarium', Petrarch alludes to and simultaneously subverts this practice, proposing that he will partake in an imaginary pilgrimage while writing a pilgrimage account, whereas his addressee Giovanni Mandelli, the primary reader of the text, will perform a real physical pilgrimage in the meantime.¹⁸ This innovative setup is directly expressed on the textual level by substituting second-person narrative for the common first-person narrative of traditional pilgrimage texts.¹⁹ Furthermore, it is taken up again at the end of the letter:

*Sed iam satis itum, satis est scriptum: Hactenus tu remis ac pedibus maria et terras, ego hanc papirum calamo properante sulcaverim, et an adhuc tu fessus sis eundo, certe ego iam scribendo fatigatus sum, eoque magis, quo celerius incessi. Quod enim iter tu tribus forte vix mensibus, hoc ego triduo consummavi. Hic utrique igitur vie modus sit.*²⁰

But you have already walked enough, I have already written enough. Until now you have gone through oceans and countries by ship and by foot, I on the other hand have gone through this papyrus with my swift pen, and whether you are already tired of walking or not, I for my part am certainly exhausted of writing, and even more so, because I moved forward at a greater pace. For you have covered the distance in about three months, but I in three days. This is now the proper limit of both our ways.

Thus, instead of a travelling author Petrarch establishes a travelling (first) reader as the focal point of his travelogue. He then sets out to describe the voyage to the Holy Land.

17 Even Egeria, as early as the 4th century CE, appeals to her fellow sisters' visual imagination, cf. Egeria, 'Peregrinatio' 3.8 and 5.8. See also Theodoric, 'Peregrinatio', in: *Peregrinationes Tres*. Saewulf, John of Würzburg, Theodericus, ed. by R. B. C. HUYGENS (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievals 139), Turnhout 1994, pp. 142–197, here p. 143; John of Würzburg, 'Peregrinatio', in: *Peregrinationes Tres*. Saewulf, John of Würzburg, Theodericus, ed. by R. B. C. HUYGENS (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievals 139), Turnhout 1994, pp. 79–141, here p. 79; cf. BOOTH (note 13) for the most recent discussion. For Petrarch's own position on virtual travels, compare his 'Seniles' 9.2; cf. Étienne WOLFF, *Quelques remarques sur l'Itinerarium de Pétrarque*, in: *Latomus* 60 (2001), pp. 176–181, here pp. 180–181.

18 The intriguing and innovative handling of time in Petrarch's 'Itinerarium' is analysed in detail by Michael STOLZ, *Petrarcas Itinerarium ad sepulcrum domini nostri Iesu Christi im Spannungsfeld der Zeiten*, in: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 93 (2019), pp. 371–391.

19 Cf. FISCHER (note 1), pp. 38–42.

20 Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 80–81.

2 A Secular Pilgrimage? Petrarch and Italy

Medieval pilgrimage texts typically begin their account of the Middle East with the city of Acre, the usual landing point for travellers from Europe until 1291.²¹ Petrarch, on the contrary, starts with the departure from Genoa and describes the journey along the Italian west coast in great detail: more than half of the text, 47 paragraphs out of 81, are concerned with Italy, and a further six with Greece and Cyprus. In contrast, the description of the Holy Land (including Egypt) takes up significantly less space, with Petrarch devoting only about 25 paragraphs to this part of the pilgrimage.²² It must be noted that in the Middle Ages, Venice had established herself as the most significant port of departure for travellers to the Middle East.²³ Therefore, to choose Genoa as a starting point must have been a deliberate device by Petrarch in order to include his detailed descriptions of the towns and places of the Italian west coast.²⁴

The quantitative disproportion privileging Italy also finds its equivalent on a qualitative level if one looks closer at the text. A typical sample of the description of Italy reads as follows:

Progredienti tibi Terracina nunc, olim Anxur, primum aderit, mox Caieta, nutricis Eneie nomen servans, ubi, quo prosperior navigatio sit, sacrum Erasmi tumulum adire ne pigeat, cuius opem multis iam in maritimo discrimine profuisse opinio constans est. Hic flexus litorum et pelagi sinus ingens saltusque lauriferi cedriférique et odoratum ac sapidum semper lete virentium nemus arbuscularum.

21 However, there are exceptions to this implicit 'rule', e.g. Saewulf (around 1100), who begins his pilgrimage account in Apulia, or Bernard the Wise (9th c.), who records his travels from Rome to Jerusalem and back again. Especially, it must be noted that Petrarch's contemporaries Wilhelm of Boldensele and Ludolf of Sudheim give an account of the voyage from Central Europe to the Middle East in their pilgrimage narratives; Wilhelm even starts his journey from Noli in Liguria and thus describes a similar itinerary to Petrarch.

22 To end the journey with a visit to Mount Sinai and Egypt is common among Jerusalem pilgrims, cf. already Theodosius, 'De situ Terrae Sanctae', 'Anonymus of Piacenza', and Adomnán, 'De locis sanctis'. Since the 13th century, however, there is an increased interest in Egypt also both for practical and 'touristic' reasons, cf. FISCHER (note 1), pp. 273–274.

23 Cf. Nicole CHAREYRON, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages*, trans. by W. Donald WILSON, New York 2005, pp. 16–46. On Venice, see also Andrea DENKE, *Venedig als Station und Erlebnis auf den Reisen der Jerusalempilger im späten Mittelalter* (Historegio 4), Remshalden 2001.

24 Cf. WOLFF (note 17), p. 179; Theodore J. CACHEY, *The Place of the Itinerarium. Itinerarium ad sepulchrum domini nostri Ihesu Christi*, in: Victoria KIRKHAM (ed.), *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Chicago 2012, pp. 229–241, here pp. 230–231. For a similar itinerary along the Tyrrhenian coast, see Wilhelm of Boldensele, who does not, however, describe any Italian site in detail: Guillaume de Boldensele *sur la Terre Sainte et l'Égypte* (1336). *Liber de quibusdam ultramarinis partibus et praecipue de Terra Sancta*. Suivi de la trad. de Jean le Long. Présentation et commentaire par Christiane DELUZ (Sources d'histoire médiévale 44), Paris 2018.

In hoc tractu Formie seu Formianum et Litternum sunt, dicam verius, fuerunt: alterum Ciceronis infanda cede, alterum Scipionis indigno exilio nobilitatum et cineribus patrie negatis. Sed hec duo loca extimatione magis animi quam oculis assequeris, alter enim iacet, alter et latet, nisi quod apud Formias adhuc due seu tres magne supereminent arene.²⁵

If you sail on, you will first encounter Terracina, formerly known as Anxur. Shortly afterwards you will come to Gaeta, which retains the name of Aeneas' nurse. There you should not regret going to the holy tomb of Erasmus, so that the journey will be more fortunate. It is certain that his power has helped many in distress at sea. There the shore forms an arch, there is a wide bay and slopes full of laurel and cedar trees, and a fragrant and delicious grove of evergreen trees.

In this area are Formiae (also known as Formianum) and Litternum, or to speak the truth, they were: one place is known for the horrific murder of Cicero, the other for Scipio's infamous exile and his ashes being refused to return home. But you will recognize these two places more with the cognition of your mind than with your eyes: one is in ruins, the other is even buried, apart from two or three heaps of rubble that rise near Formiae.

Petrarch describes the sailing route along the Italian west coast as a series of waypoints, similar to a route map. Whereas the act of travelling itself rarely features in the narrative, the narrator focuses on individual places mostly singled out for their connection with ancient myths or history. This structure is borrowed from the tradition of medieval pilgrimage texts, which usually organize their description of the Holy Land within a similar itinerary framework.²⁶ There, the waypoints consist mainly of a canon of holy places firmly established since late antiquity, to which biblical narratives are linked.

In contrast, Petrarch defines a new canon of Italian sights, most of which derive their importance from pagan antiquity, thus creating a network of literary places instead of biblical locations. Major focal points are Virgil, who is honoured with multiple quotations throughout the text, and the wanderings of Aeneas. Not surprisingly, the Gulf of Naples is described extensively, and the tombs of Virgil and Pliny the Elder, the accounts of which constitute the exact middle of the text, are almost framed as a destination for secular pilgrimage:

²⁵ Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 28.

²⁶ Cf. FISCHER (note 1), pp. 42–57. There are only a few exceptions to the rule, such as Burchard of Mount Sion's 'Descriptio Terrae Sanctae', which is organized geographically by dividing the Holy Land into quadrants. On Burchard, see FISCHER (note 1), pp. 240–247. Also FISCHER in this volume, pp. 73–77.

Hec est civitas ubi Virgilius noster liberalibus studiis operam dedit, cum iam ante patria illum tua Mediolanum tenerioribus annis discipulum habuisset. Hic se carmen illud Georgicum scripsisse, hic se ignobili otio floruisse verecundissime memorat. Hanc dulcem vocat ille Parthenopem, id enim est aliud de nomine conditricis civitati nomen. Demum peregre moriens inter extrema suspiria sue meminit Neapolis et huc revehi optavit, ut, quam vivus amaverat, vita functus incoletet.

Hinc tandem digresso biceps aderit Vesevus, vulgo Summa monti nomen, et ipse flammam eructare solitus. Ad quod olim spectaculum visendum cum experiendi noscendique cupidine perrexisset Plinius Secundus, vir scientie multiplicis et eloquentie floride, vento cinerem ac favillam excitante compressus est: miserabilis tanti viri exitus! Sic Neapolis hinc Mantuani, inde Veronensis civis ossa custodit.²⁷

This is the city where our Virgil devoted himself to the liberal studies, after your hometown had this Milanese fellow as her student at a young age. He mentions very modestly that he wrote his famous ‘Georgics’ here and lived here in fameless peace. He calls this city the sweet Partenope, which is another name of the city after its foundress. Finally, when he died abroad, he remembered his Naples at his last gasps and wished to be brought back there so that, having completed the course of life, he could dwell in the city he had loved in life.

When you finally sail off from here, you encounter the two-headed Vesuvius, called ‘Monte Somma’ by the people, and it is also accustomed to breathe fire. When Pliny the Elder, a man of diverse learning and florid eloquence, set out to see this remarkable spectacle, driven by desire for knowledge and understanding, he was crushed to death as the wind stirred up volcanic ash and cinders: a miserable end for such a man! Thus, Naples guards the bones of the Mantuan citizen at one place, those of the Veronese at another.

In contrast, the description of the Holy Land seems arid and summary at first glance, maybe even perfunctory. Contrary to his depiction of Italy, Petrarch deviates from the traditional model of pilgrimage texts in that he rarely gives any place names and does not follow a recognizable route map. Instead, he claims that his addressee has already made his mind up anyway and does not need further guidance:

Itaque tametsi multa tibi in medio querenda et visenda monstraverim, que poteras improvisus forte solumque vie finem cogitans preterire, hic, quid te moneam, non habeo. Omnia enim iam, hinc antequam pedem domo

²⁷ Petrarch, ‘Itinerarium’ 39–40.

moveas, preconcepta animo et diu agitata sunt tibi [...]. Neque vero tu aliam ob causam tantum laboris ac negotii suscepisti, nisi ut in illa morte Domini sacra urbe locisque finitimis videres oculis, que animo iam videbas: amnem scilicet, quo lotus est Cristus; templum seu templi ruinas, in quo docuit; locum, ubi summa cum humilitate passus est corpore, ut nos animi passionibus liberaret; sepulcrum, ubi sacratissimum corpus illud substitit, dum ipse mortis et inferni victor ad regna hostis spolianda descenderet, unde etiam reversus idem corpusque iam immortale recipiens pressis gravi sopore custodibus resurrexit. Sion preterea et Oliveti montem, ad hec et unde in celum ascendit, quo ad iudicium reversurus creditur, ubi ventis et fluctibus imperavit, ubi cibo exiguo maximam turbam pavit, ubi aquam vertit in vinum.²⁸

Even if I have suggested many things you could investigate and see on your journey, which you may have passed without taking notice, unprepared and only thinking about the end of your expedition, now I have nothing to point out to you. For everything has been already premeditated in your mind and considered at length, before you set out from home [...]. But indeed, you would not have taken upon yourself so much labour and effort, if not to see with your own eyes in the city that is sanctified by the death of the Lord and in its surroundings, what you have already seen with your mind: for example, the river where Christ was baptized; the temple or rather its ruins, where he taught; the place where he physically suffered with the greatest humility to liberate us from the passions of the soul; the tomb where this holiest body persevered, while he himself, the victor over death and the underworld, descended to despoil the realm of the fiend; and when he returned, he adopted an already immortal body and rose from the dead, while the guardians were shrouded in heavy slumber. Furthermore, Mount Sion and the Mount of Olives, which he ascended and from which he ascended to heaven, whence he will come again for the last judgement, as we believe; the place where he commanded the winds and the floods; the place where he fed a huge crowd with minimal food; the place where he turned water into wine.

To explicitly deny descriptions of holy places is admittedly rare, but not completely unheard of, in other pilgrimage texts. A possible, if distant, parallel is provided by Magister Thietmar, a German pilgrim of the early 13th century, who in his account of the Holy Land refuses to elaborate on Jerusalem (of all places!) with the following words:²⁹

²⁸ Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 55–57.

²⁹ Nevertheless, Thietmar proceeds with a succinct description of Jerusalem deliberately engineered to demonstrate the sorry state of Christian places under Muslim rule. For another case of avoidance of the earthly Jerusalem cf. also Jerome, Letter 58 (to Paulinus).

*De sancta civitate quia multi multa dixerunt et quia de ea multa dici possunt, me aliqua dicere duco ociosum.*³⁰

Because many people have already said many things about the holy city, and because there could be much said about it, I consider it superfluous to say anything about it.

But more importantly, Petrarch's Holy Land is conspicuously not described as a geographical entity, but as a purely spiritual place. Even though he uses the *locus-ubi* scheme known from pilgrimage texts, he does so without supplying most of the place names.³¹ As a consequence, the history of salvation is recalled, but deliberately not linked to a geographical framework. Petrarch consciously eschews a precise localization in the physical world in order to concentrate on the acts of salvation only visible for the spiritual eye or the *oculi fidei*. This is also demonstrated by his description of Bethlehem, where he imitates the vision of St Paula from Jerome's 108th letter. Like his hypotext, Petrarch fades out the physical surroundings and focuses on the biblical narrative, which his addressee can visualize at this place.³²

This noticeable difference in the treatment of Italy and the Holy Land cannot be a coincidence, and certainly not inability on the part of the author. It is a deliberate stylization, which should attract attention and thus should be put into context. Scholars have suggested that the numerous ancient places of the Tyrrhenian coast had acted as a primary motivation for Petrarch writing the 'Itinerarium' and that there were strong autobiographical overtones to the description of Italy.³³ Indeed, Petrarch parades his own literary achievements, placing himself next to classical literature, and even advertises his own unfinished epic 'Africa' while describing the Tyrrhenian coast.³⁴ It has even been argued that the 'Itinerarium' should be seen as

30 Magister Thietmar, 'Peregrinatio' 9, in: Mag[istri] Thietmari Peregrinatio, ed. by Johann Christian Mauritz LAURENT, Hamburg 1857, p. 26; Magistri Thietmari Peregrinatio. Pilgerreise nach Palästina und auf den Sinai in den Jahren 1217/18, ed. by Ulf KOPPITZ, in: Concilium Medii Aevi 14 (2011), pp. 121–221, here p. 148. On Thietmar, see Philip BOOTH, Encountering Muslims and Miracles: The Holy Land Pilgrimage of Thietmar, 1217–1218 (forthcoming).

31 On the *locus-ubi* scheme see FISCHER (note 1), pp. 52–54.

32 Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 62; Jerome, Letter 108.10; cf. FISCHER (note 1), pp. 110–113, esp. p. 112 (my own translation): "What is noticeable in the description of Bethlehem is that Paula's actions and the biblical event she experienced are at the centre of Jerome's portrayal. What is actually seen is not said and is also of no importance. It is important that the history of salvation can be relived on site." Petrarch uses the verb *contemplari*, the meaning of which oscillates between seeing and imagining.

33 Cf. WOLFF (note 17), p. 179; Francesco STELLA, The Landscape as a Memory Construction in the Latin Petrarch, in: Lucie DOLEŽALOVÁ (ed.), The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages (Later Medieval Europe 4), Leiden, Boston 2009, pp. 215–239, here pp. 222–225; CACHEY (note 2), pp. 24–31.

34 Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 19. A similar attitude to the authors of classical antiquity can be found in the last book of Petrarch's 'Ad familiares', in which the dead poets are framed as Petrarch's familiar friends.

a humanist's pilgrimage to the places of ancient literature rather than a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.³⁵ Whereas the notion of an autobiographical agenda in the text is surely significant and will be considered at the end of this contribution, I would like to challenge the last interpretation. Petrarch's description of the Holy Land, strange though it may seem, is more than a mere pretext or negligible accessory.

3 A Neoplatonic Pilgrimage? Petrarch and the Holy Land

In the following section, I will argue for a Neoplatonic reading of the 'Itinerarium'. To my knowledge, this has not been attempted so far, although the influence of Augustine and Christian Neoplatonism on Petrarch is well known and has informed the interpretation of other texts, such as 'Ad familiares' 4.1.³⁶ A typical feature of Neoplatonic allegorical literature is the ascent from the physical world to the vision of God by means of contemplation. High and late medieval examples can be found in Bernardus Silvestris' 'Cosmographia', Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus', Dante's 'Commedia', and, of course, the aforementioned letter 'Ad familiares' 4.1 by Petrarch himself, which is worth a closer look and can provide a key to understanding the 'Itinerarium'.³⁷

In this famous letter, Petrarch gives an account of his ascent of Mount Ventoux on 26 April 1336 to his fatherly friend and teacher, the Augustinian monk Francesco Dionigi. For a long time, this letter has primarily been interpreted as direct historical evidence of a new, modern experience of nature, and Petrarch has even been styled the "father of alpinism".³⁸ Only in the course of the 20th century have scholars recognized the symbolic character of the ascent and now predominantly advance an allegorical interpretation of the text.³⁹ It is entirely possible that both the letter and the ascent

35 Cf. Pasquale SABBATINI, *L'itinerarium di Petrarca. Il viaggio in Terrasanta tra storia, geografia, letteratura e sacre scritture*, in: *Studi rinascimentali* 4 (2006), pp. 11–22.

36 See e.g. Dorothee GALL, *Augustinus auf dem Mt. Ventoux: Zu Petrarca's Augustinus-Rezeption*, in: *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 35 (2000), pp. 301–322; Martin M. BAUER, *Krise und Gottesschau: Konstruktionen autobiographischen Erzählens bei Rupert von Deutz, Ricoldus de Monte Crucis und Francesco Petrarca*, in: *Vienna Doctoral Academy – 'Medieval Academy'* (ed.), *Narrare – Producere – Ordinare. New Approaches to the Middle Ages*, Vienna 2021, pp. 29–44.

37 For the most recent edition of this letter see Rodney LOKAJ (ed.), *Petrarch's Ascent of Mount Ventoux. The Familiaris IV,1. New Commented Edition (Scriptores Latini 23)*, Rome 2006.

38 This interpretation goes back to Jacob BURCKHARDT's seminal book 'Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien' ('The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy') from 1860, accessed in Jacob BURCKHARDT, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, ed. by Horst GÜNTHER (Bibliothek der Geschichte und Politik 8), Frankfurt a. M. 1989, pp. 294–297; cf. e.g. Morris BISHOP, *Petrarch and his World*, London 1964, p. 104; Karlheinz STIERLE, *Petrarcas Landschaften. Zur Geschichte ästhetischer Landschaftserfahrung (Schriften und Vorträge des Petrarca-Instituts Köln 29)*, Krefeld 1979, passim, esp. pp. 22–27; Hans Robert JAUB, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, pp. 140–142.

39 E.g. Lynn THORNDIKE, *Renaissance or Prenaissance?*, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943), pp. 65–74; Michael O'CONNELL, *Authority and Truth of Experience in Petrarch's Ascent of*

of the mountain are completely fictional, especially since it is unlikely that such an ingeniously constructed text, peppered with quotations, was written in the hostel immediately after their return, as Petrarch wants us to believe.⁴⁰ Even the date of the letter is laden with symbolism: in 1336, Petrarch turned 32, the same age as Augustine when he converted to Christianity. However, as Giuseppe BILLANOVICH has shown, the version we read today was undoubtedly created during Petrarch's last stay in Vaucluse, around 1353, that is 17 years after the event described and only a few years before the 'Itinerarium'. If there had ever been a historical ascent of Mount Ventoux, it is certainly presented in a highly literary revision.⁴¹

The addressee, Francesco Dionigi de San Sepolcro, is also significant. He was professor of theology in Paris and also Petrarch's confessor for some time. In particular, he made Petrarch familiar with the ideas of Augustine; the copy of the 'Confessions' Petrarch took to Mount Ventoux being a gift from him. It is therefore all but inevitable that the letter to the confessor gradually develops into a kind of autobiographical confession or 'conversion narrative'.⁴² While Petrarch often misses the right path and needs numerous detours to finally reach his goal, he finds time for self-reflection and to contemplation of the human condition.⁴³ Petrarch's wrong turns are contrasted with the straight and determined ascent of his younger brother Gherardo, who in 1343 had decided to lead a contemplative life in the charterhouse of Montrieux. In this way, Mount Ventoux becomes an allegory of human life, just like the forest at the beginning of the Dante's 'Commedia', and the ascent to the summit is turned into a Christian-Neoplatonic ascent to God.⁴⁴

Mt. Ventoux, in: *Philological Quarterly* 62 (1983), pp. 507–520; Ruth GROH and Dieter GROH, *Die Außenwelt der Innenwelt. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur* 2, Frankfurt a.M. 1996, pp. 17–82; Jens PFEIFFER, *Petrarca und der Mont Ventoux (Zu Familiars IV,1)*, in: *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift N.F.* 47 (1997), pp. 1–24; GALL (note 36); Dieter MERTENS, *Mont Ventoux, Mons Alvernae, Kapitol und Parnass. Zur Interpretation von Petrarca's Brief Fam. IV, 1 'De curis propriis'*, in: Andreas BIHRER (ed.), *Nova de veteribus: Mittel- und neulateinische Studien für Paul Gerhard SCHMIDT*, Munich et al. 2004, pp. 713–734; LOKAJ (note 37), esp. pp. 28–43; a good overview of the scholarly discussion can be found in Heinz HOFMANN, *War er oben oder nicht? Retraktionen zu Petrarca, Familiars 4, 1*, in: Wolfgang KOFLER, Martin KORENJAK and Florian SCHAFFENRATH (eds.), *Gipfel der Zeit. Berge in Texten aus fünf Jahrtausenden*. Karlheinz Töchterle zum 60. Geburtstag, Freiburg i.Br. 2010, pp. 81–102. For a slightly different philosophical interpretation see also Tomáš NEJESCHLEBA, *Petrarch's Ascent of Mount Ventoux and Philosophy*, in: *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 64 (2019), pp. 81–94.

40 Petrarch, 'Ad familiars' 4.1.35.

41 Giuseppe BILLANOVICH, *Petrarca und der Ventoux*, in: August BUCK (ed.), *Petrarca (Wege der Forschung 353)*, Darmstadt 1976, pp. 444–463, first published as: *Petrarca e il Ventoso*, in: *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 9 (1966), pp. 389–401. See also Ugo DOTI, *La figura di Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro in Petrarca*, in: *Belfagor* 55 (2000), pp. 564–571.

42 On 'conversion narrative' and autobiography in late medieval epistolography see BAUER (note 36). Compare also Donald BEECHER, *Petrarch's "Conversion" on Mont Ventoux and the Patterns of Religious Experience*, in: *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme N.S.* 28 (2004), pp. 55–75.

43 Petrarch, 'Ad familiars' 4.1.9–15.

44 On Neoplatonism in the letter see also GALL (note 36).

Compared to the continuous philosophical self-examination, the physical ascent of the mountain fades into the background; when he finally reaches the summit, Petrarch's brother has to call his attention to the marvellous view. Even then, there is no trace of a real experience of landscape in the text: Petrarch can perceive the elemental force of the Alps only indirectly through the literary authority of Livy and Pomponius Mela; while considering the breath-taking panorama he only thinks of his antiquarian knowledge of Athos and Olympus.⁴⁵ This predominance of ancient authorities over the travellers' own experience is, however, a typical phenomenon in medieval pilgrimage texts and travel accounts.⁴⁶ It also reminds us of the first part of the 'Itinerarium', in which the places portrayed gain value mostly through ancient authorities as well.

Finally, at the summit of Mount Ventoux the peripety of the letter is staged in the way of a book oracle, analogous to the garden scene of Augustine's 'Confessions', which itself serves as hypotext in a *mise en abyme*.⁴⁷ Petrarch flips the book open at random and finds a critique of his admiration for the physical world:

*Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum et oceani ambitum et giros siderum, et relinquunt se ipsos.*⁴⁸

And people go to admire the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waters of the sea, and the farthest rivers, and the scale of the ocean and the circles of the stars, and they lose themselves.

In the letter, this impulse leads to a conversion experience and a turn towards transcendence. Taking his cue from Augustine, Petrarch asks why people seek in the external world what they could easily find in themselves.⁴⁹ He spends the remainder of the tour in silent contemplation. Thus, the allegory of ascent gets ingeniously redefined. In the first part of the letter, physical and spiritual ascent correspond to each other. In the second part, they become disassociated from each other. Physical descent now

45 Petrarch, 'Ad familiares' 4.1.17–25. This peculiarity has already been noted by great naturalist Alexander von HUMBOLDT at the beginning of the 19th century, cf. Alexander von HUMBOLDT, *Kosmos. Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, p. 214, n. 82, first published in five volumes 1845–1862. See also William M. BARTON, *Mountain Aesthetics in Early Modern Latin Literature*, London, New York 2017, p. 216.

46 Cf. Herbert DONNER, *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land. Die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palästina-pilger (4.–7. Jahrhundert)*, Stuttgart 1979, p. 32; Sylvia SCHEIN, 'From 'Holy Geography' to 'Ethnography'. 'Otherness' in the Descriptions of the Holy Land in the Middle Ages, in: Ilana ZINGUER (ed.), *Miroirs de l'Altérité et Voyages au Proche-Orient*, Geneva 1991, pp. 115–123, here pp. 115–116; FISCHER (note 1), pp. 41–42.

47 Petrarch, 'Ad familiares' 4.1.27.

48 Augustine, 'Confessions' 10.8.15.

49 Petrarch, 'Ad familiares' 4.1.32. On the antithesis *intus–foris* in Augustine's 'Confessions', see Wendelin SCHMIDT-DENGLER, *Die 'aula memoriae' in den Konfessionen des heiligen Augustin*, in: *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 84 (1968), pp. 69–89.

correlates with spiritual ascent. This is Petrarch's innovative take on the Platonic and Neoplatonic model of a gradual ascent to the vision of God: within the physical world, man can at best reach the threshold of transcendence, after which the soul has to detach itself from its earthly receptacle and continue the path in the spiritual world alone.⁵⁰ In the two most influential medieval poems influenced by Neoplatonism, Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus' and Dante's 'Commedia', the threshold of transcendence is indicated by a change in the soul's guide: from Ratio to Fides or from Virgilio to Beatrice, respectively. In Petrarch's interpretation, on the other hand, the threshold of transcendence lies at the summit of Mount Ventoux, at the highest physical point on earth that he is able to visit. From there his soul can continue the ascent to God while he himself descends back into the valley.

The letter ends appropriately with the similarly Neoplatonic appeal to Francesco Dionigi to pray that Petrarch's soul will succeed in arriving at the supreme One, Good and True, i.e. God: *ad unum, bonum, verum, certum, stabile se convertant*.⁵¹ The question of whether this will ultimately come to pass remains unanswered. But the two halves of the letter – the ascent inspired by Roman antiquity and the descent marked by Christian Neoplatonism – can be read as Petrarch's metapoetic reflection on the two central themes of his Latin oeuvre and their relationship to each other: the imitation of classical antiquity in 'Africa', 'De viris illustribus', and the letters on the one hand, and the imitation of Augustine in the 'Secretum' and the philosophical-theological treatises on the other.⁵² Since classical literature had inspired the entire enterprise from the outset and consequently is capable of leading Petrarch – like Virgilio in Dante's 'Commedia' – to the threshold of transcendence, it acquires an independent anagogical value, even if it remains subordinate to the spiritual contemplation that reaches beyond.⁵³

Petrarch himself explicitly links his Neoplatonic ascent of Mount Ventoux both to human life and more specifically to earthly life as a pilgrimage to God (*peregrinatio*).⁵⁴ Did he implement a similar concept within his 'proper' pilgrimage text, the 'Itinerarium'? A first clue is provided by the following statement, taken from the account of the Holy Land:

50 See Augustine, 'Confessions' 7.17.23, a passage Petrarch alludes to in 'Ad familiares' 4.1.15. Cf. PFEIFFER (note 39), p. 11.

51 Petrarch, 'Ad familiares' 4.1.36.

52 For this interpretation of 'Ad familiares' 4.1 see BAUER (note 36). Similar metapoetic analyses have been advanced by GROH and GROH (note 39), pp. 304–307; MERTENS (note 3), pp. 724–725 and pp. 733–734. The conflict between pursuit of earthly reputation and orientation towards Christian values is fundamental in Petrarch's literary work, cf. Bernhard HUSS, 'Roma caput rerum'? Geschichtsinzenierung, episches self-fashioning und christlicher Selbstzweifel in Petrarca's Africa, in: M. DISSELKAMP et al. (ed.), *Das alte Rom und die neue Zeit. Varianten des Rom-Mythos zwischen Petrarca und dem Barock*, Tübingen 2006, pp. 23–44, here pp. 42–44.

53 Cf. also Jens HALFWASSEN, *Die Idee der Schönheit im Platonismus*, in: *Méthexis* 16 (2003), pp. 83–96, esp. pp. 93–96; Stefan BÜTTNER, *Antike Ästhetik. Eine Einführung in die Prinzipien des Schönen*, Munich 2006, pp. 178–190.

54 Petrarch, 'Ad familiares' 4.1.12–13.

*Sequendus in terris querendusque nobis Cristus est, ut vel sic discamus eum ad celum sequi et ubi aliquando habitavit diu quesitum tandem, ubi habitat, invenire.*⁵⁵

We must follow Christ on earth and seek him out so that we precisely by this means learn to follow him to heaven and to find him finally at the place where he lives now, whom we have sought for a long time at the places where he once had lived.

Here, Petrarch contrasts earthly pilgrimage, which supposedly encompasses travelling the physical world and seeing with one's physical eyes, with a spiritual vision of God only attainable through pious contemplation. Travelling to the Holy Land in order to "follow Christ on earth", as his addressee Giovanni Mandelli does, is therefore only the first step. The physical pilgrimage must be completed through spiritual pilgrimage, a practice of meditation Petrarch provides for in his remarkably non-geographical account of the Holy Land. Instead of mapping routes to a physical landscape, he describes paths into the spiritual world. Thus, the 'Itinerarium', as a whole, employs a similar bipartite structure to the letter 'Ad familiares' 4.1: in the first part, it deals with the physical world already described by ancient authorities; in the second part the focus shifts to inner contemplation eventually enabling the vision of God through the *oculi mentis* or *oculi fidei*, as exemplified in Bethlehem.

Further evidence can be adduced from Petrarch's rendition of the legend of Augustus at Alexander's tomb in Alexandria. Asked if he wanted to see the tomb of Ptolemy as well, Augustus allegedly answered that he wanted to see the king, not dead bodies.⁵⁶ For the use of Giovanni Mandelli, Petrarch reframes this witticism as *sanctos cupias videre, non mortuos* ("you should wish to see holy men, not dead men"). In the context of the 'Itinerarium', these "dead men" can only refer to the ancient authors of the first part, such as Virgil and Pliny, whose tombs and legacy Petrarch described at length in Naples.⁵⁷ Again, a clear distinction is made between a physical world represented by pagan antiquity, where dead men are just dead, and the spiritual world bursting with eternally living saints and martyrs. In this perspective, the first part of the 'Itinerarium', though seemingly more detailed and fleshed out, is in fact only a description of the physical world and thus inherently inferior to the outwardly vague account of the Holy Land as a purely spiritual, non-geographical place.⁵⁸ The striking stylistic difference in Petrarch's description of Italy and his description of

⁵⁵ Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 64.

⁵⁶ Ancient sources for this story are Suetonius, 'Life of Augustus' 18, and Cassius Dio, 'Roman History' 51.16.5.

⁵⁷ CACHEY (note 2), p. 31 inexplicably misconstrues the anecdote as being Petrarch's justification for ending his travelogue with Alexander's tomb ("the king") instead of the Holy Sepulchre (which would thus, bizarrely, correspond to the "dead bodies" in his interpretation).

⁵⁸ Cf. also STOLZ (note 18), pp. 387–388.

the Holy Land undoubtedly serves to accentuate this ontological imparity between the physical world visible through the eyes of the body and the spiritual world that eventually leads to the vision of God.

Again, there seems to be a distinct autobiographical element in the transition from the Italian landscape accommodating the classical authors and Petrarch's own 'Africa' on the one hand, to the Neoplatonic spirituality of the second part on the other. If we compare the treatise 'De otio religioso', probably finished around 1357 and thus in direct proximity to the 'Itinerarium', we can get another view of Petrarch shaping his autobiography as a story of spiritual pilgrimage and crediting Augustine's 'Confessions' with catalysing his conversion:

Et sane quod nunc assero ante non multos annos forte vel tacite negassem: Illi gratias qui michi oculos aperuit ut aliquando viderem quod cum magno discrimine non videbam, quemque nunc etiam caligantes oculos purgaturum spero ad reliqua que damnosa tarditate nondum video, quam in me hactenus minus miror, cum Ieronimum ipsum de se fatentem audiam, quod sibi in libris gentilium occupato cum se ad sacra vertisset eloquia, ut verbo eius utar, 'sermo horrebat incultus'. [...]

Sero, iam senior, nullo duce, primo quidem hesitare, deinde vero pedentim retrocedere ceperam, ac disponente Illo, qui malis nostris ad gloriam suam semper, sepe etiam ad salutem nostram uti novit, inter fluctuationes meas [...] Augustini Confessionum liber obvius fuit. [...]

Ab illo igitur primum raptus et a semitis meis parumper abductus sum. Accessit sacer et submissa fronte nominandus Ambrosius, accessere Ieronimus Gregoriusque, novissimus oris aurei Iohannes et exundans lacteo torrente Lactantius: ita hoc pulcerrimo comitatu Scripturarum Sacrarum fines quos ante despexeram venerabundus ingredior et invenio cuncta se aliter habere quam credideram.⁵⁹

And sure enough, not many years ago I would have denied openly or tacitly what I now assert: thanks to him, who opened my eyes so that I now see what I did not see with all my judgement, whom I now hope to purify my clouding eyes for the remaining things which I do not yet see due to my fatal tardiness. At which I am not so much surprised, as I hear Jerome himself confess that having studied pagan literature, he was, in his own words, taken aback by the plain style, when he turned to holy scripture. [...]

Very late, in mature age, without any guide, I started to hesitate and then to gradually retrace my steps. And through his will, who always knows how to use our shortcomings to his glory and often to our salvation,

59 Petrarch, 'De otio religioso' 2, in: Il 'De otio religioso' di Francesco Petrarca, ed. by Giuseppe ROTONDI (Studi e Testi 195), Vatican City 1958, pp. 103–104.

in the midst of my uncertainties [...] I came across Augustine's book of Confessions. [...]

By this I was first taken away and driven off my usual ways for a while. In addition, there was holy Ambrose, who can only be named with a humble face, there were Jerome and Gregory, and very recently also John Chrysostome and Lactantius, who pours forth a milky flow of words. Thus, accompanied by this most lovely fellowship, I entered the realms of Holy Scripture which I had disregarded earlier, and I found that everything was different than I had thought.

The metaphors of vision and travel, which we already encountered in the 'Itinerarium', are once again noteworthy. Here, the wording at first recalls the famous statement of Paul in 'Corinthians' 13:12. With his vision purified from earthly residues, Petrarch is then able to cross the threshold to transcendence and to enter the wholly spiritual world of Holy Scripture, which corresponds to the equally spiritual space of the Holy Land in the 'Itinerarium'.

With all these parallels, there can be little doubt that Petrarch saw the genre of pilgrimage texts as yet another opportunity for self-fashioning.⁶⁰ However, the autobiographical element is not confined to the first, 'Italian' part of the 'Itinerarium', as previous scholars have suggested, but pervades the whole text as a kind of 'conversion narrative'.⁶¹ The 'Itinerarium' should be seen as a unified whole held firmly together by an overarching Neoplatonic framework. Pilgrimage becomes a metaphor for human life, which in Petrarch's philosophical view ideally proceeds from the study of ancient authors to the recognition of God as the true point of reference.

4 Petrarch and Virgil

But this does not necessarily mean that the Petrarch of the 1350s completely disavows classical learning in favour of his newfound attraction to Christian spirituality. It should be stressed that in the letter about Mount Ventoux, classical education had played an important part for inspiring the ascent at the outset. The intricate relationship of classical antiquity and Christianity can be seen most clearly in Petrarch's use of Virgil in the 'Itinerarium'. As we have seen, Virgil is an important focal point in the first, Italian part. But his influence does not completely vanish after that. At

⁶⁰ The importance of self-fashioning in Petrarch is widely acknowledged. Cf. e.g. Karlheinz STIERLE, Francesco Petrarca: ein Intellektueller im Europa des 14. Jahrhunderts, Munich, Vienna 2003, pp. 345–474; HUSS (note 52), p. 28; Peter KUON, Petrarca's Selbstkanonisierung, in: Bernd ENGLER and Isabell KLAIBER (ed.), Kulturelle Leitfiguren – Figurationen und Refigurationen, Berlin 2007, pp. 57–68. Roberta ANTOGNINI, Il progetto autobiografico delle Familiars di Petrarca, Milan 2008, pp. 31–114.

⁶¹ Cf. BAUER (note 36).

a key point in the second part, the journey from the Holy Land to Egypt, Petrarch quotes from the 'Aeneid' again:

Durum iter, fateor, sed ad salutem tendenti nulla difficilis via videri debet. Multas ubique difficultates, multa tibi tedia vel hominum vel locorum hostis noster obiciet, quibus te ab incepto vel retrahat vel retardet vel, si neutrum possit, saltem in sacra peregrinatione hac minus alacrem efficiat. Hic vero preter cetera nativam locorum ingeret asperitatem penuriamque rerum omnium. Sed meminisse conveniet omne optimum magno pretio constare et Virgilianum illud in tuos usus transferre, ubi ait: vicit iter durum pietas [Verg. Aen. 6.688 = Proba 664], et illud Lucani paululum immutare: durum iter ad leges animeque ruentis amorem [Luc. bell. civ. 9.385]. Nichil tam durum, quod virtus ardens et pietas incensa non molliat.⁶²

A hard journey, I concede, but for one who strives for salvation no way can seem difficult. Our fiend thwarts you with many difficulties, many obstacles of men and places, by which he deters you and holds you back from the journey you have begun, or if this is not possible, makes you at least less efficient in your holy pilgrimage. But in this region, he even adds the native roughness and the shortage of all things to the other obstacles. But it shall be fit to remind you that each excellent commodity comes at a high price and to put the following quotation of Virgil to your use, when he says: piety conquered the hard journey. And to change Lucan's adage a little bit: hard is the journey to the laws and an impassioned soul's journey to love. Nothing is so hard that ardent virtue and passionate affection could not mollify it.

Vicit iter durum pietas is a quotation from the sixth book of the 'Aeneid', in which Aeneas traverses the underworld to visit his deceased father Anchises and which also served as inspiration for Dante's *Virgilio*. The words form part of Anchises' opening speech after their lachrymose reunion. Medieval Christian Neoplatonists like Bernardus Silvestris had interpreted Aeneas and Anchises as the human soul and God the Father, respectively, and the sixth book of the 'Aeneid' accordingly as a pilgrimage to God through the physical world.⁶³ Petrarch's quotation thus draws on contemporary Neoplatonic readings of Virgil's 'Aeneid'.

⁶² Petrarch, 'Itinerarium' 66.

⁶³ Bernardus Silvestris, 'Commentum super sex libros Eneidos', in: *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Virgil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. by Julian Ward JONES and Elizabeth Frances JONES, Lincoln 1977, pp. 9–10; cf. Alexander CYRON, *Das 'Commentum super sex libros Eneidos' des Ps.-Bernardus Silvestris. Formen der Kommentierung und didaktische Struktur*, in: *Das Mittelalter 17* (2012), pp. 25–39.

This is remarkable, as in the first part of the ‘Itinerarium’, Petrarch consistently presents a literal, positivist interpretation of Virgil’s work. But when he moves on to the spiritual world of the Holy Land, he also starts advancing an allegorical interpretation of the ‘Aeneid’, thereby exemplifying the anagogical force of classical literature in accordance with the fourfold sense of medieval hermeneutics. Consequently, classical learning and humanist values are not to be rejected in principle. Instead, they can lead mankind on to the search for the supreme Good – a thoroughly Neoplatonic concept.

5 Conclusion

As demonstrated, it proves fruitful to examine Petrarch’s ‘Itinerarium’ within the wider context of medieval travel literature: against the backdrop of literary tradition, it becomes clear that Petrarch builds upon longstanding typical elements of pilgrimage narratives to inscribe his text into a recognized genre. However, by choosing an elaborate epistolary setting, by imbuing the text with antiquarian material sourced from classical antiquity, and by imposing a subtle anagogical structure from a classical landscape on the spiritual world of the Bible, he also innovates and adds new dimensions of meaning. Having shaped the journey’s first, antiquarian part as a traditional pilgrim’s itinerary, Petrarch may have even intended a subtle critique of traditional pilgrimage in the vein of Jerome’s ‘Letter’ 58 or Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘Letter’ 2, who advise Christians to seek God in their own hearts.⁶⁴

The peculiarities and innovations of the ‘Itinerarium’ can be explained through a Neoplatonist reading, corresponding to Petrarch’s stance in his roughly contemporary ‘Ad familiares’ 4.1 and ‘De otio religioso’, among other writings. By equating pilgrimage with life and framing the journey as a Neoplatonic conversion narrative, the text works as an autobiographical reflection on the relationship of classical learning and Christian spirituality. For Jerome, being a *Ciceronianus* and being a *Christianus* had been mutually exclusive.⁶⁵ To Petrarch, both travelling to the sources of classical culture and travelling the physical world are a transitional, yet significant step on the way to fully seeing the Neoplatonic-Christian supreme Go(o)d with his spiritual eyes.

⁶⁴ On this debate on pilgrimage cf. Georgia FRANK, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 2000; Brouria BITTON-ASHKELONY, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 2005.

⁶⁵ Cf. Jerome, Letter 22.30 (to Eustochium).