

GILES OF VITERBO ON THE PHLEGRAEAN FIELDS: A VERGILIAN VIEW?

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IN HIS THOUGHTFUL ARTICLE, "Giles of Viterbo as Classical Scholar," my colleague John Whittaker observed that the title "classical scholar" is not necessarily synonymous with that of "humanist."¹ In common with the leading lights of his day Giles had acquired a fair fluency in the reading of both Greek and Latin and was well versed in the literatures of these two languages—though he knew Greek literature direct only in part, supplementing it through Latin and vernacular translations.² Since he was *utriusque linguae eruditissimus* and was even known in his day as a "Christian Cicero,"³ there is no disputing the fact that Giles of Viterbo was an eminent humanist.

To answer his own question whether Giles also deserves to be reckoned a "classical scholar" and to draw the distinction between the two terms, Whittaker makes use of a definition of classical scholarship formulated by A. Gudeman in his *Grundriss der Geschichte der klassischen Philologie*:⁴

In a narrower sense, Classical Philology comprises palaeography, textual criticism, hermeneutics, grammar and rhetoric, and aesthetic or literary criticism ("higher criticism") of the Greek and Roman writers. *In a broader sense*, it includes the study and investigation of Greek and Roman Antiquity in all its various manifestations, as these are known to us through extant literary and monumental remains [my emphasis].

Whittaker concluded that Giles by and large measured up to being a classical scholar even in the broader sense, insofar as he regarded the region known as the Phlegraean Fields through exclusively classical and, more particularly, Vergilian spectacles. The present enquiry has no desire to deny

The following authors will be cited by authors' name alone: P. Amalfitano, G. Camodeca, and M. Medri (eds.), *I Campi Flegrei: Un itinerario archeologico* (Venice 1990); E. Martène and U. Durand, *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historicorum, dogmaticorum, moralium amplissima collectio* 3 (Paris 1724; repr. New York 1968); J. Whittaker, "Giles of Viterbo as Classical Scholar," in *Egidio da Viterbo, O.S.A. e il suo tempo: Atti del V Convegno dell' Istituto Storico Agostiniano, Roma-Viterbo, 20-23 ottobre 1982* (Rome 1983, *Analecta Augustiniana*) 85-105.

¹See Whittaker 85-92 for the points re-examined in my paper.

²For some examples of Greek works studied in the original and some in Latin, see Whittaker 98 f.

³Pietro Summonte in *Opera omnia Ioh. Ioviani Pontani* 2 (Venice 1519) fol. 154^v.

⁴Translated into English from Gudeman's second edition (Leipzig and Berlin 1909) 8, by M. R. P. McGuire, *Introduction to Classical Scholarship*² (Washington 1961) 4.

the title classical scholar to Giles. But it undertakes to reexamine the whole question of whether Giles in fact adopted an exclusively Vergilian viewpoint, by focusing upon Giles's attitude towards the monumental remains of "the Sibyl's cave" during his Grand Tour of the Phlegraean Fields in the year 1498. In so doing it explores for the first time the origins behind some post-Vergilian beliefs concerning this region generally and about the Sibyl's cave in particular.

In a letter written to Mariano da Genazzano "from the bank of Avernus" (*ex Averni ripa*) in the spring of 1498, Giles recalls their recent visit to the "Sibyl's cave" (*Sybillae sacellum*).⁵ It is evident from his letter that, as Whittaker well observes, Giles applies this name to the so-called "Grotta della Sibilla" on the southern shore of Lake Avernus,⁶ rather than to the actual Sibyl's cave of trapezoidal shape which Amedeo Maiuri excavated in 1932 just below the Temple of Apollo, itself located upon the southern spur of the Cumaean acropolis.⁷ Giles was so awed by the Avernian cave that he visited it repeatedly during his sojourn,⁸ and when he entered what he called its "inner sanctuary" (*aedicula*), he fancied that he fell under the spell of the Sibyl's prophetic afflatus.⁹

In another letter sent to Gabriele della Volta "from the Puteolean lake" (*ex Puteolano lacu*)—by which, again, is meant Lake Avernus¹⁰—Giles reports that his visits to the Avernian Sibyl's cave gave him the sensation of being "drawn to Hades."¹¹ Quite how he experienced this sensation he does not make explicit, but his successive references in this letter to the

⁵*Epistola* 13 in Martène and Durand cols. 1252–54: *penetramus demum Sybillae sacellum, et id quidem saepissime: visi nescio quod et plus sapere et vaticinari, cum ejus aediculam conchiliis vitreisque tesseris exornatam insidemus: quo cum te in tabula jacentem traheremus, minimo minus perii: tepore enim occlusi aëris ita spiritus impediri tibi videbatur; ut sudans atque aestuans pene exanimatus evaderes, sed cum redieris, habeo res grandes cognitione dignissimas.*

⁶For more on this cave, see the next and subsequent paragraphs.

⁷For criticism of Maiuri's identification and a successful recent defence of this cave as the Sibyl's genuine oracle-centre see R. C. Monti, "The Topographical and Literary Evidence for the Identification of the Sibyl's Cave at Cumae," *Vergilius* 37 (1991) 39–59.

⁸*Epistola* 13 in Martène and Durand col. 1252: *penetramus demum Sybillae sacellum, et id quidem saepissime.*

⁹*Ibid.* 1252: *visi nescio quod et plus sapere et vaticinari, cum ejus aediculam . . . insidemus.*

¹⁰On the use of the name of the town of Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) to designate an area as far as Avernus and beyond, see below, n. 29.

¹¹G. Signorelli, *Il Card. Egidio da Viterbo Agostiniano, umanista e riformatore: 1469–1532* (Florence 1928) 218: *superiores annos ad superos, nunc, quo crimine nescio damnatus, ad inferos detrusus, perhorresco quotidie specus, alnum Acherusiam et Charontis cymbam. sed id superest laetioris fati quod sacram Cumae vatis eadem saepissime adoremus proni. vale. ex Puteolano lacu.* [Bibl. Angelica 688 f.12]. For the required emendation of the last sentence see below, n. 22.

cave, the Acherousian elm-tree, and Charon's barque¹² seem to suggest that as he journeyed through the cave he imagined himself to be following in the footsteps of the Sibyl past the elm-tree in Hades' vestibule and along the path to where Charon punts the souls of the dead over the waters of Acheron.¹³ It matters little for this reconstruction of Giles's sensation whether *alnum*, "alder tree," the actual word recorded in Signorelli's edition of Giles's letter (see above, note 11), is an error of memory on Giles's part or a corruption of *ulmum*, "elm tree," the home of false dreams in the descent-imagery at Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.283.

From the combination of these two letters it is evident that Giles believed the Cumaean Sibyl to have not only uttered her oracles within the Avernian "Grotta della Sibilla" but also led the Trojan hero Aeneas through it into Hades. Since we know from archaeological evidence to be mentioned below that in the medieval period a hot-spring welled up within the "inner sanctuary" of this cave, Giles's allusion to Charon's barque is literary evidence that the *aedicula*, in which Giles claims to have felt the Sibyl's prophetic powers, was water-logged in his day as it is now. It would appear that, for his imaginative reconstruction of Charon's crossing over the waters in his barque, he thought of the water lying here as bordering upon the infernal world and therefore as being Acheron's. The Italian local guides of the present time still speak of the water found in this precise spot within the cave as belonging to the Land of the Dead.

We cannot expect Giles to have known the origin of this cave, which runs more or less due south through Lake Avernus' high crater-rim (known here as Monte della Ginestra) from its southern shore to emerge at the northern shore of the adjacent Lake Lucrinus. It was actually driven through the tufa rock in Vergil's lifetime for Octavian's use against Sextus Pompeius in the aftermath of Julius Caesar's murder as part of the military installations in the area. The tunnel-like cave allowed communication by land between Lake Avernus and Lake Lucrinus when the former lake was transformed into a naval base called *Portus Julius*.¹⁴ In regarding this as

¹² *Ibid.* 218: *ad inferos detrusus, perhorresco quotidie specus, alnum Acherusiam et Charontis cymbam*. On the word *alnum* see in my text immediately below.

¹³ Cf. Vergil *Aen.* 6.283, 295, and 302–304. I say that Charon crosses Acheron to take account of Giles's reference to the "Acherousian tree," the elm-tree in Vergil being at the place from which the road leads to Acheron and the infernal ferryman Charon. More precisely, Vergil says that the Acheron pours into the infernal Cocytus (295–297) and Charon is elsewhere said to cross the Stygian marsh (323, 369, cf. 374, 385, 414), which can be identified with the Stygian lake (134), so that Charon crosses this underworld lake and yet he is guardian of (*servat*) Acheron and Cocytus (295 ff.). Charon's barque must therefore be envisaged in Vergil's account as somehow crossing the Stygian marsh at the confluence of the rivers Acheron and Cocytus.

¹⁴ Vergil praises the construction of this port at *Georgics* 2.161–164. Strabo 5.4.5 names Cocceius as the author of both the so-called "Grotto of Cocceius" on the western

the cave of both prophecy and descent, Giles was simply accepting a post-Vergilian tradition, which associated this military cave with Vergil's location of the (imaginary) descent-cave at Avernus, with which the Sibyl's prophetic cave was also, by a separate process, confused and conflated.¹⁵ For his "huge yawning mouth" (*vastoque immanis hiatus*) describing the imaginary descent-cave at verse 237 in the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid*, Vergil may even have been inspired by the *Realien* of the cave's Roman entrance, which is much smaller now than it was in Vergil's day. But had Giles read Vergil's text closely, he would have noticed that the poet described two separate Sibylline caves. The Sibyl utters her oracles in a cave upon the Cumæan acropolis (*Aen.* 6.10 f., 42 ff., and 77 ff.) and descends into the netherworld through another beside Lake Avernus (*Aen.* 6.236 ff.). The tendency to confuse them is already evident as early as Statius, who in his *Silvae* seems to associate the Sibyl's oracular cave with Avernus.¹⁶ The fourth-century Vergilian commentator Servius was careful to distinguish between these two caves lying some three kilometers away from each other. He observes that the Avernian cave "through which Aeneas and the Sibyl made their descent to the Lower World is not where the Sibyl had prophesied."¹⁷

It is true that the whereabouts of the Sibyl's oracular "trapezoidal" cave discovered by Maiuri at Cumae were, in all likelihood, lost by Giles's day,¹⁸ and that Giles wrote at a time when the Avernian "Grotta della Sibilla" was widely regarded as both the oracular cave of the Sibyl and the Hades-entrance through which the Sibyl led Aeneas to the infernal world.¹⁹ But even before Maiuri's discovery, careful readers of Vergil's text protested against the traditional interpretation of the "Grotta della Sibilla"—Cluverius for instance in the seventeenth century and Conington

shore of Avernus and the famous *Crypta Neapolitana*, but this architect and engineer in all likelihood built the so-called "Grotto della Sibilla" also. Both grottos are part of the overall military design associated with the naval port.

¹⁵I say "imaginary" because there is no genuine catabolic cult-cave beside Avernus. See on this Colin G. Hardie, "The Great Antrum at Baiae," *PBSR* 37 (1969) 14-33, at 16 ff., esp. 32 f. For the Sibyl's genuine prophetic cult-cave, see above, n. 7, and immediately below.

¹⁶*Silvae* 5.3.172-173: *sic ad Avernales scopulos et opaca Sibyllae / antra rogaturae veniebant undique gentes*. Cf. 4.3.114-116 and 131-133.

¹⁷*Ad Aen.* 6.237: the Avernian cave is *qua ad inferos descendebatur, non ubi fuerat Sibylla vaticinata*."

¹⁸I argue in a forthcoming paper, "Agathias and the Cumæan Sibyl's Cave," that Narses blocked the entrance during his siege of the Goths in A.D. 552 when he undermined the fortification of the acropolis by carving away the roof of this underlying oracular cave. For this event see Agathias *Hist.* 1.10.3 and 7.

¹⁹For more on the origins of this tradition see my forthcoming "The Avernian Sibyl's Cave: From Military Tunnel to Mediaeval Spa," and cf. Statius (above, n. 16).

in the nineteenth²⁰—insisting that the Sibyl's oracular cave must be situated at Cumae and not at the lakeside of Avernus. Giles is not among these. He made no effort to correlate this local tradition with these passages in the *Aeneid*. Had he done so, he would have found that there was no correlation.

I shall now pass quickly over the near mystical experience which induced Giles actually to revere this spot made holy by the Sibyl. Whittaker adequately documents Giles's familiarity with the widespread Christian tradition that adopted the Cumaean Sibyl as the mouthpiece of God. He points to Giles's prostrations in her honour at the cave—*sacrum Cumae vatis . . . saepissime adoramus proni*—as coming as close as anything does to renaissance paganism.²¹ Whittaker has here emended the mood of the verb and as well the adjective *sacram* in Signorelli's unintelligible text (*sacram Cumae vatis eadem saepissime adoremus proni*) to read *sacrum*, to denote the cave, but the sentence is still left problematical. A different correction, *sacram Cumaeae vatis aedem saepissime adoramus proni* ("prostrate we venerate the sacred home of the Cumaean prophetess on repeated visits"), makes perfect sense.²² It may be added that more than a thousand years earlier, the unknown third-century Christian author of the *Cohortatio ad Graecos* known as pseudo-Justin Martyr was sufficiently interested in the Cumaean Sibyl—who he, too, believed was God's mouthpiece—to pay a visit to her oracular cave at Cumae.²³ Yet, despite the prevalence of the Christian domestication of Sibyls, there is no evidence—to enlarge on an observation of Whittaker's—that either of these two "Sibylline caves" was ever regarded as a Christian sanctuary. They always remained pagan monuments, even though (as we shall see) a mistaken local legend told of Christ's earthly return through the Avernian cave after his Harrowing of Hell.

²⁰P. Cluverius, *Italia Antiqua* (Lugdunum Batavorum 1624) 1104–14. J. Conington, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*⁴, rev. H. Nettleship (London 1884) 2.442 on *Aen.* 6.131, may not have known where on the Cumaean acropolis Aeneas was standing when he left the cave, but he did assert that Aeneas was there.

²¹Whittaker 89–90, citing (with two changes to be mentioned immediately below) Giles's letter to Gabriele della Volta *ap. Signorelli* (above n. 11) 218. Various landmarks in the treatment of the Sibyl by Christian writers are traced very clearly by H. W. Parke, ed. B. C. McGing, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London and New York 1988) 152–173.

²²I am most grateful to H. W. Stubbs for this suggestion. *Cumae* is haplography for *Cumaeae* (cf. Vergil *Aen.* 6.98); the inversion of letters from *eadem* to *aedem* restores the Sibyl's "sacred home" (her cave is her "home" too, *domus*, at Vergil *Aen.* 6.53); even the subjunctive *adoremus*, admittedly odd in a *quod*-clause, could be kept if there is a distinction between the unavoidable fit of the creeps at the cave and the river, and potential prostration ("the fact that we can adore") at the *sacellum*.

²³J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* (Paris 1881, *Series Graeca* 6) chap. 37, col. 308.

When surveying Giles's wonderment at the region, Whittaker makes the surprising allegation that Giles not only "avoids any mention of the many thermal and mineral baths which continued to flourish in the zone at least until the volcanic disturbances of 1538" but also "chooses to ignore them, as he does every other aspect of the region which postdates classical antiquity, or which finds no echo in *Aeneid* Book VI."²⁴ In fact, Giles marvels at the perpetual fires of the Phlegraean (i.e., "Fiery") Fields and, with awed exaggeration, calls attention to "the thousand thermal mineral springs" occurring naturally in the area; he also writes of the *testudines* dug out of the core of Mons Misenus which earn Giles's punning reference to the mountain as *aereus*, of a thousand caves and paths that lead to the underworld, and of subterranean structures bereft of light.²⁵ The fact that Giles refers to some features of the topography which do not appear in Vergil in no way disqualifies Giles as a classical scholar. But Giles does mention them, and why should he not? He calls the fumaroles and hot springs *miracula naturae*.

In the same breath Giles even allows himself to fancy that the visitor can hear—and it will terrify him—the lamentations of the wretched.²⁶ He here reveals an allegorical bent of mind: he does not deny that tourists hear the hissing of fumaroles (*ignium stridorem*), but he accepts that on a higher level of truth (*verius*) they interpret the sound as the lamentations of souls. Much the same idea is reported of a certain Bishop John of "Puteoli" (modern "Pozzuoli"). Gervasius of Tilbury tells how this Bishop heard the wailing of souls rising from the hollow of a sulphury mountain in which they were being punished.²⁷ The lamentations from inside the mountain might have been genuine acoustic effects, but one suspects that the whole thing is modelled on *Aeneid* 6.557–561, where Aeneas on his travels through the netherworld approaches the flaming river surrounding Tartarus and hears from within the groans and the flogging and the lamentation rising into the air. Gervasius goes on to describe the Bishop's visit to a nearby lake, from which he also heard lamentations. After pouring water on its surface, "he sees at the bottom gates of brass and bolts of iron lying about in great quantities, and it occurred to this holy man that these were the

²⁴ Whittaker 91.

²⁵ *Epistola* 13 in Martène and Durand col. 1252: *scrutamur tamen interim miracula naturae phleg[r]eos campos, ubi perpetua incendia, et mille ferventium aquarum discrimina visuntur . . . subimus Misenum, qui montium unus dici potest aereus. pendet enim omnis miris intus testudinibus cavatis. subimus mille subterraneos specus, vias occultas longissimas magnificasque ad Plutonis regna, aedificia solis lucisque inscia. Giles's explanation of Vergil's Monte sub aërio, qui nunc Misenus ab illo/Dicitur (Aen. 6.234 f.) is un-Vergilian.*

²⁶ Giles completes the first sentence quoted in the previous note by adding: *ut terreri possit spectator, audiens verius miserorum ejulatus, quam ignium stridorem.*

²⁷ *Otia Imperialia* 3.17.

gates of Hell which our Lord Jesus Christ smashed open on the occasion when he harrowed Hell."²⁸ It is a reasonable assumption that this lake is Avernus and that this Christian event was attracted to the Avernian Hades-entrance under Vergilian influence.²⁹ And if the Bishop supposed that the gates were simply the gates of Hades or Sheol or Limbo, and that Tartarus or Gehenna was a segregated enclosure under the adjacent mountain, the Vergilian resemblance is still closer—since Vergil's sundry limboes (apart from the queues of the unburied) are all beyond the River. These ideas do not appear then to be inconsistent with the Vergilian notion that Lake Avernus—or rather the cave beside it (see n. 28)—and by extension the Phlegraean Fields, are an entrance-way to the underworld, but they nevertheless constitute a development from Vergil.

Less than eight years after Gervasius published his *Otia Imperialia* in 1212, we find another twist to the location of this medieval Christian legend in a poem (which I am currently editing) entitled *De Balneis Puteolanis*, "On the Baths of Puteoli (Pozzuoli)," by the Italian chronicler Peter of Eboli. The poem describes numerous baths from Baiae through Avernus to Pozzuoli. At one point Christ re-emerges from the Lower World through the boiling mineral waters of the spa called Tripergula,³⁰ which was situated on the eastern shore of Lake Lucrinus close to Avernus. Presumably this spa, too, was regarded locally as a kind of Hell's mouth since, as Peter says, health-giving hot-springs have their source in the infernal "house of torments,"³¹ where indeed Christ had been among the dead when he harrowed Hell. Finally, when in September 1538—less than a half-century

²⁸*Ibid.* 3.18: *vidit sub aqua portas aeneas et vectes ferreos maximae quantitatis prostratos, coepitque in viri sancti mentem subire, has esse portas Inferni, quas Dominus noster Jesus Christus confregit, quando Infernum spoliavit.* In Vergil, however, the Hades-entrance is not the lake itself, but the cave beside it. On the confusion between lake and cave as the entrance-way into the underworld, see my "Vergil, *Aeneid* 6: The Bough by Hades' Gate," in R. M. Wilhelm and H. Jones (eds.), *The Two Worlds of the Poet: New Perspectives on Vergil* (Detroit 1992) 167–178, esp. 173 f.

²⁹See the previous note and cf. R. J. Clark, "Christ's Resurrection at Avernus: A Vergilian Influence," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 30 (1969) 300–307, where at 301, n. 4 I assumed from the fact that the lake was nameless and associated with Pozzuoli that it was not Avernus. However, as I learnt later from the poem by Peter of Eboli (to be mentioned below) and from numerous other medieval sources, Pozzuoli designates an area extending well beyond the town itself to Baiae in the west and therefore includes Avernus, which lies between. Cf. also above, n. 10.

³⁰In lines 169–171 of my forthcoming edition: *Est lacus a strata quo portas Christus Aveni / Fregit, et eduxit mortuus inde suos. / Hic domus est duplex—de iure Tripergula dicta.* Here Peter keeps the location of the lake, but suggests that Christ actually rose through the spa-waters of Tripergula. The poem has been edited under an alternative title by J. M. D'Amato, *Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Illustrated Medieval Poem De balneis Terre Laboris by Peter of Eboli* (diss., Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore 1975) 413 for this passage (with slightly different text).

³¹*Ibid.* lines 4–6: *A tormentorum provenit ede salus. / Nam, que defunctos aqua fervens punit in ymis, / Hec eadem nobis missa ministrat opem.*

after Giles had visited the region—the sudden volcanic emergence of Monte Nuovo swallowed up the whole medieval village of Tripergula, baths and all, the legend of Christ's resurrection became attached to the Grotta della Sibilla itself.³² Though Giles makes no reference to the medieval legend associating Christ with the area, he is, as we have just seen, caught up in the popular excitement of imagining that the cries of the dead can be heard, if the spectator will but listen to where the hot-springs rise from the fiery house of punishment in the world below.

The Sibyl's own association with a thermo-mineral spa is another post-Vergilian development which Giles does not stop to question. In his letter to Mariano da Genazzano he recalls how, when the two of them were together shortly before, he helped carry Mariano on a stretcher into the Sibyl's "inner sanctuary"—presumably in the hope that he would be cured of his incapacitating ailment. The "enclosed hot air" was too much for Mariano, who was brought out gasping for breath, sweating, and "half-dead"—*pene exanimatus*.³³

For our purpose of observing Giles as an antiquarian from the viewpoint of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, there is no need to outline all of the stages by which the supposed Sibyl's cave came to be regarded as a medieval therapeutic spa. But two passages illustrate just how far Giles has come from Vergil. In the earlier of the two passages, pseudo-Justin Martyr, while describing the trapezoidal Sibyl's cave at Cumae, reports seeing about half way along its main gallery three cisterns within a recess, in which local guides point out that the Sibyl used to bathe before pronouncing her oracles from a raised platform in her innermost shrine.³⁴ The Sibyl's practice of bathing is a non-Vergilian detail referring to an act of ritual purification, which is in all likelihood a (late?) Pythianization of the Sibyl.³⁵ The sec-

³²See, e.g., J. F. Breithaupt, *Christlicher Helden Insel Malta* (Frankfurt 1632) 205; John Boys, *Aeneas His Descent into Hell* (London 1661) 67. Both passages are discussed more fully in Clark (above, n. 29).

³³Giles's description is quoted fully from *Epistola* 13 in Martène and Durand. It is not an unambiguous statement, but it is a reasonable inference from what we know of the cave that the stretcher-episode was a therapeutic consultation. Whittaker's assertion (89) that Mariano suffered from crippling arthritis fits the fact that this spa, called Palumbara in medieval tradition, was said to dispel this disease (*artheticamque fugat*, line 272 in my forthcoming edition of Peter of Eboli). Though Mariano was probably overcome by the warm stuffiness (*tepore . . . occlusi aëris*), not to mention partial dehydration, there must have been heat from the hot spring (see below, n. 38). This spring was almost certainly affected, as were others in the area, by the volcanic emergence of nearby Monte Nuovo in 1538. There is water, but no heat is produced at the site today.

³⁴Chap. 37 in Migne (above, n. 23) col. 308. For the recess in the trapezoidal cave, which is readily identifiable today, see below, n. 35.

³⁵Parke (above, n. 21) 84 f., thinks that the Sibyl's bathing may be an original detail which Vergil passed over in silence, and that the recess to which pseudo-Justin refers—and which contains three cisterns of Roman workmanship—may simply be a Roman reworking of an original ritual bath.

ond passage is a letter written to Arnold of Lübeck in 1195 by the Chancellor of the Swabian Emperor Henry VI and Bishop of Hildesheim, Conrad of Querfurt, who in the course of describing the Avernian cave refers—in language which suggests that he too was reporting received tradition rather than innovating—to “what is currently called the Sibyl’s bath.”³⁶ It is to be observed that the Sibyl’s bath has by now become attached to the Avernian cave. Its transference from the Cumaean to the Avernian cave is consistent with the local interpretation of the “Grotta della Sibilla” as the place where the Sibyl prophesied. Conrad does not say whether his guides described the Sibyl’s bath as having been for her exclusive, purificatory use or whether it was now regarded as generally therapeutic.³⁷ But Giles’s description of a medicinal spa in the “Sibyl’s cave” points to a medieval development, which must have been encouraged as much by the fact that a hot-spring actually existed within the Avernian cave’s “inner sanctuary” (*aedicula*)³⁸ as by the natural tendency on the part of visitors to assume that this “Sibyl’s bath” had a therapeutic use similar to the other natural *thermae* in the area. None of this has any basis in Vergil’s Sixth Book of the *Aeneid*. But Giles has accepted it all, with the awkward consequence that what he calls the “inner sanctuary” must serve as the place where the Sibyl both delivered her oracles and had a therapeutic hot-spring. It is also the place where the presence of water was regarded as being at the same time the Sibyl’s bath and the infernal water over which Charon plied his barque to the far shore of Hades.

In all of this Giles comes over as an excited and enthusiastic admirer of Vergil’s country, capable of experiencing “numinous” feelings, and presenting aspects of the topography which have not received mention in Vergil. From the evidence as he marshalls it, Whittaker infers that “Giles has chosen to present the region as seen through Virgilian spectacles and to set aside every other aspect, including the Christian This effort of imagination is one which we would assuredly expect the classical scholar to make.”³⁹ But does not Giles seem rather to have fallen under the influence of the medieval periegetic tradition and to have accepted without question whatever the confused local tradition and its medieval accretions offered his imagination to work on? We may observe in particular that Vergil does not celebrate the hot-springs of the Phlegraean Fields or the vaulted caves within Monte Miseno, and we look in vain in the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid* for any reference to the Sibyl’s spa, or for the wailing of the dead that can be heard in the upperworld, or even for an oracle-centre beside Avernus.

³⁶ *Quod hodiernis diebus balneum Sybille nuncupatur* in Conrad’s letter in G. H. Pertz (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores* (Hannover 1864) 21.194 f.

³⁷ I argue in my more detailed article (above, n. 19) on this point that in Conrad’s day it probably still had the reputation of being purificatory.

³⁸ For the existence of this hot spring, see Amalfitano *et al.* 176

³⁹ Whittaker 91.

In fact, should any modern scholar doubt whether there was any outstanding renaissance humanist so pervasively influenced by the periegetic, humanistic tradition as actually to embrace all of the contradictions inherent in it, Giles's letters are unique in providing an instance of just such a man. It is true that the contradictions are to some degree masked by Giles, insofar as he divides them between the two letters. In the one to Mariano da Genazzano he portrays the Sibyl's "inner sanctuary" as the place for both prophecy and healing. In the other to Gabriele della Volta he associates the cave with both prophecy and Hades. The only basis for healing within the Sibyl's cave was the therapeutic hot-spring, whose overflow in the second letter becomes the infernal water over which Charon makes his crossing. The double interpretation of the water could be reconciled if, like Peter of Eboli, Giles subscribed to the belief that hot-springs had their source in the infernal House of Torments. Giles's notion that hot-springs were places where one may hear the lamentations of the wretched as they suffer in the netherworld, goes part way in that belief. But it may be doubted whether he fully rationalized the conflicting humanistic and Christianized balnealogical traditions to the extent of consciously supposing that the spa water of the Sibyl's bath and the infernal water crossed by Charon were one and the same by reason of having their source in the infernal house of punishment.

Nevertheless Giles's accounts have a special value. They not only reveal the credulous nature of an eminent humanist and provide much interesting information about the medieval periegetic traditions pertaining to the so-called Grotto of the Sibyl and, more generally, to the region of the Phlegraeon Fields, but his is the only extant eyewitness report of an actual therapeutic consultation of this "Sibyl's bath." And although Giles is not the first to have referred to the Sibyl's cave as the site of a spa, earlier writers such as Conrad do not identify the precise whereabouts of the Sibyl's bath within the cave. Moreover, Giles's description of the Sibyl's "inner sanctuary" (*aedicula*) is the earliest we have pinpointing the prophetess's oracular setting, according to the mistaken post-Vergilian tradition that places it within the Avernian cave. It remains to see what else can be gleaned from Giles's description.

The Avernian tunnel is a complex structure, which the volcanic eruption of Monte Nuovo blocked at the Lucrinus end. A series of rooms on different levels to the west of the main crypta has still not been fully excavated nor has their original purpose been established, though recently some Italian archaeologists have provided a tentative plan of the cave.⁴⁰ There is a water-logged room to the west of the main crypta, where the hot spring was found. The report of their findings correctly indicates the room to have

⁴⁰For the most recent plan see Amalfitano et al. 174, after M. Pagano, M. Reddé, J.-M. Roddaz, "Recherches archéologiques et historiques sur la zone du lac d'Averne," *MEFRA* 94 (1982) 271-323, at 305.

been regarded in medieval tradition as the inner sanctuary where the Sibyl both bathed and uttered her oracles. Giles, as we have just seen, gives the double interpretation of this so-called Sibyl's inner sanctuary—and he offers an unmistakable identification of it by describing a mosaic within it thus: *aediculam conchiliis vitreisque tesserais exornatam*, “the inner sanctuary decorated with ‘shells’ (or ‘purple’, on which see further below) and glass paste tesserae.”⁴¹ As the archaeologists, who make no mention of Giles, correctly report, it is only in this water-logged room within the cave-complex that a mosaic is to be found, though an adjoining room preserves the remains of frescoes.

The diarist John Evelyn gives fuller details than Giles when recording his own visit to this cave in 1645:⁴² “We enter a vast Cave, in which having gone about two hundred paces [i.e., along the main gallery whose total length is about 200 metres], we passe a narrow Entry [i.e., turning westward off the main gallery], which lead us into a room of about 10 paces long, proportionable broad & high: The side-Wales and rooffe retaine still the golden Mosaique, though now exceedingly decay'd by time: Here is a short Cell, or rather Niche cut out of the solid rock, somewhat resembling a Couch; in which they report the Sybilla lay, and utterd her Oracles; though by most, suppos'd to have been a Bath onely.” This account substantiates Giles's identification of the “inner sanctuary” and repeats the traditional confusion of the Sibyl's oracular sanctuary with her bath. The couch mentioned by Evelyn is to be identified with what the Italian archaeologists say was a bed built into the brickwork in the medieval period. They also report finding in the same room two medieval bath tubs at the level of the water, one of which is beside the hot-spring. It bears repeating that they found in this room only the mosaic decoration independently described by both Giles and Evelyn, which they themselves characterize as being “partly in *signinum* and partly in small white tesserae interspersed with black.”⁴³

Concerning Giles's attention to detail Whittaker poses a challenge. He admits that Giles did not describe the cave with any clarity of personal observation, but comments: “There is one potentially redeeming detail in Giles' account of the Sibyl's cave which is of considerable interest . . . no one to my knowledge other than Giles has indicated the presence of *conchilia*. Nor does there now appear to be any trace of such in the cave. One wonders therefore whether we have here an item of archaeological information which would otherwise have remained unknown, or whether Giles'

⁴¹ *Epistola* 13 in Martène and Durand col. 1252.

⁴² E. S. De Beer (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Oxford 1959) 180.

⁴³ Amalfitano et al. 176: “a lato della vasca posta in fondo a sinistra, presso la quale è una sorgente d'acqua calda, la parete è rivestita da numerosi frammenti di mosaico, parte in *signinum* e parte a piccole tessere bianche con inserti neri, riutilizzati per impermeabilizzare la parete.”

memory has served him awry I leave this problem . . . in the hands of the student of Campanian topography."⁴⁴

I do not see how this "problem" can be firmly settled with our present knowledge. But it is worth weighing in the scales some further possibilities. It is indeed odd that Giles is alone in mentioning "shells," if that is the meaning of *conchilia* here, given the detailed description of the mosaic in the Sibyl's supposed inner sanctuary by such writers as Scipio Mazzella:⁴⁵ "Era questa camera per quanto hora sivede tutta riccamente ornata, percioche il Cielo, e di azzuro oltramarino, e d'ora fino, e le parete di vaghe pietre di diversi colori, e il suolo è medesimamente di picciole pietre fatto alla musaica, opera veramente, non meno ricca, che artificiosa." This passage confirms John Evelyn's reference to the golden mosaic, of which there is no longer any trace. And since *conchilia* can denote either the "shells" of shell-fish or the purplish colour extracted from them,⁴⁶ and is sometimes put to denote the objects so coloured,⁴⁷ Giles might well have written *conchiliis* to signify the bluish colour of the mosaic upon the ceiling, which Mazzella independently describes as "sea-deep blue" ("di azzuro oltramarino"). Or, if Giles had in mind a shell decoration, perhaps framing the mosaic, did it, unlike the mosaic, completely disappear in the century-long interval between Giles and Mazzella? Or might Giles simply have misapplied to this cave a curious report, which also became part of the medieval periegetic tradition, concerning some shells which belonged to other caves connected with baths in the neighbourhood?

For this tradition I turn again to Gervasius of Tilbury, who tells how, in the Middle Ages, after creating all the hot-springs of the Phlegraean Fields, Vergil the Magician "set up individual inscriptions indicating *with individual shells* the ills which each bath cured."⁴⁸ The repetition of *singulis* in Gervasius' Latin implies that one inscription was written per (fairly large scallop-type) shell. Gervasius goes on to say that these inscriptions had recently (i.e., three centuries before Giles) been destroyed by some doctors from Salerno, when these observed how the baths interfered with their own business and they wished to leave the people ignorant of the properties of the waters. Thereafter the cures continued to be advertised in the form of carved figures pointing to various parts of the body cured by the

⁴⁴Whittaker 91 f.

⁴⁵The description in his *Sito et Antiquità della città di Pozzuolo* (Naples 1594) 131 f., is the fullest known to me. (I regret that I have not been able to consult the first edition of this work dated 1593.)

⁴⁶Cf. Pliny HN 9.36.61.130: *concharum ad purpuras et conchyliā—eadem enim est materia, sed distat temperamento—duo sunt genera.*

⁴⁷E.g., Juvenal *Satires* 8.101: *Spartana chlamys, conchyliā Coa*, where *conchyliā*, "purples," denote purple garments.

⁴⁸*Otia Imperialia*, 3.15: *singulisque cochleis singulos titulos superscripsit, in quibus notitia erat [Vergilius], cui morbo quod balneum deberetur.*

different waters. These figures were located according to tradition in the baths of Tritoli, more commonly known as the Stufe di Nerone, reached through a cliff face midway between Avernus and Baiae. The tradition about them is recorded by such writers as Peter of Eboli⁴⁹ and Petrarch.⁵⁰ A manuscript version of the *Cronaca di Partenope*⁵¹ dated ca 1326–1342 describes them as also having inscriptions above their heads. The fact that these figures were long gone, when some visitors to the region in the sixteenth century report looking for them in vain, did not prevent others right down to the nineteenth century from offering what they claimed to be eyewitness accounts of them.⁵² Given the persistence of this tradition among those who let their imagination run away with them and given Giles's ready acceptance of traditions with strong Vergilian emotional associations, there is a remote but real possibility that Giles misapprehended what he had been told about the shells associated with baths in this area and believed that in the room of the Sibyl's spa, which he could see was richly decorated in mosaics, there must have been shells too.⁵³

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⁴⁹In the epigram *De Balneo quod Tritulus dicitur* within his poem (lines 241 ff. in my forthcoming edition).

⁵⁰*Epistolae de Rebus Familiaribus* 5.4.

⁵¹Reproduced from the second edition of D. Comparetti, *Virgilio nel Medio Evo* (Florence 1896) 2.253, by E. Percopo, "I Bagni di Pozzuoli," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 11 (1886) 726–729, but omitted in the English translation and replaced by another version of the *Cronica* in Pasquali's revised Italian edition.

⁵²The details are provided by G. M. Kauffmann, *The Baths of Pozzuoli* (Oxford 1959) 60 f.

⁵³I should like to record my gratitude to H. W. Stubbs for many valuable suggestions which are here incorporated and the special helpfulness of an anonymous reader for *Phoenix*. For support of my research on Peter of Eboli and on ancient baths I am grateful also to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.