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Dante and the Florentine Chronicles

by

Marco Prina

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

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Professor Albert Ascoli, Co-Chair

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines Dante's engagement with the traditions regarding collective memory in medieval Florence. In particular, it investigates the ways in which Dante responds to public and private attempts at forging both individual and collective identity in Florence. Selecting key chronicles, inscriptions and visual sources alluded to in the *Commedia*, the implications of Dante's representation in terms of his ideological response are then extensively discussed.

After introducing the central passages from the *Commedia* relevant to my project and a review of selected secondary literature on Dante and history, the dissertation introduces the Medieval Latin *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae* as Dante's most important source regarding his city's foundation. In so doing, the textual readings are informed by the formation and control of memory, history and identity in historical context. Building on Dante's reliance on the *Chronica*, the dissertation reveals the continuity of civic historiography up to Dante's time and argues that Dante's engagement with the medieval Florentine collective memory tradition can be better understood through a close look at the shifting account of Florence's foundation from the *Chronica* to Brunetto Latini's *Tesoro* to the *Commedia*. In such a way, there is a development of the multifaceted problem of engagement with the ideologically charged materials that built collective memory in medieval Florence.

The agents responsible for producing publicly displayed visual representations to legitimize their own perspective are then discussed. Building on the complex relationships between the *Chronica*, the *Tesoro* and the *Commedia*, the dissertation discusses the integration of two well-known visual productions with this textually mediated tradition: the statue of Mars and the *primo popolo* inscription on the Palazzo del Podestà. Thus, Dante's critical response to the politically charged construction of collective memory is further analyzed through the lens of the chronicle tradition in the Cacciaguida episode. An internal tension emerges between the allusions to the ethical perversion of the self-justifying political purpose of the chronicles' role, and the direct reference to the chronicle tradition in Cacciaguida's episode which is constructed over the exaltation of Florentine's moral virtues before the city's commercial and political expansion. In so doing, Dante seems to disconnect the foundational myths fabricated by the early chroniclers from any justification of an expansionist project, proposing instead a conservative political and social vision shaped by the traumas of the experience, both of the factionalized city and of his own exile.

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Preface

This dissertation, “Dante and the Florentine Chronicles,” centers around Dante’s engagement with the traditions regarding collective memory in medieval Florence. In particular, it investigates the ways in which Dante responds to public and private attempts at forging both individual and collective identity in Florence. Selecting key chronicles, inscriptions and visual sources alluded to in the *Commedia*, the implications of Dante’s representation in terms of his ideological response are then extensively discussed.

Chapter One, “Contextualizing Dante’s engagement with the medieval Florentine construction of collective memory,” introduces the close readings of the Dantean passages presented throughout the dissertation. After a review of selected secondary literature on Dante and history, this chapter introduces the Medieval Latin *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae*, which is Dante’s most important source regarding his city’s foundation. Providing a theoretical framework for the dissertation, I argue that the *Chronica* can be read in light of collective memory theory. In so doing, this chapter sets the stage for textual readings informed by the formation and control of memory, history and identity in historical context.

Chapter Two, “Dante, Brunetto and the Florentine chronicles,” builds on Dante’s reliance on the *Chronica*, revealing the continuity of civic historiography up to Dante’s time. Beginning with a survey of the passages in the *Commedia* where the *Chronica* is invoked, the chapter argues that Dante’s engagement with the medieval Florentine collective memory tradition can be better understood through a close look at the shifting account of Florence’s foundation from the *Chronica* to Brunetto Latini’s *Tresor* to the *Commedia*. The key passages of the *Commedia* discussed in this chapter are drawn from *Inferno* XIII-XV, tying together the episode of the anonymous Florentine suicide and the encounter with Brunetto. Thus, the chapter demonstrates that these two characters represent two sides of the multifaceted problem of engagement with the ideologically charged materials that built collective memory.

Chapter Three, “Connecting literary and visual representations of Florence’s foundational mythologies,” focuses on the aim of the agents responsible for producing publicly displayed visual representations to legitimize their own perspective. Building on the complex relationships between the *Chronica*, the *Tresor* and the *Commedia* developed in the previous chapter, this chapter sheds light on the *Commedia*’s engagement with the urban and political context of medieval Florence by discussing the integration of two well-known visual productions with this textually mediated tradition. The first is a statue, identified by Dante as representing Mars, which stood near the Arno River since early medieval times until it was washed away by a flood in 1333. The second is the *primo popolo* inscription publicly displayed on the Palazzo del Podestà in 1255.

The Conclusion, “Subverting the Political Values of Florentine Foundational Myths in the Cacciaguida Episode,” further explores Dante’s critical response to the politically charged construction of collective memory, analyzing the presentation of the chronicle tradition in the Cacciaguida episode. Keeping *Inferno* XIII and XV in the background, the Conclusion thus deals with an internal tension between the allusions to the ethical perversion of the self-justifying political purpose of the chronicles’ role, and a direct reference to the chronicle tradition in Cacciaguida’s episode which is constructed over the exaltation of Florentine’s moral virtues before the city’s commercial and political expansion. In so doing, Dante seems to disconnect the foundational myths fabricated by the early chroniclers from any justification of an expansionist project, proposing instead a conservative political and social vision shaped by the traumas of the experience, both of the factionalized city and of his own exile.

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Last but not least, it is absolutely clear to me that this dissertation could not have existed without the caring and patient presence of my beloved wife Sara Russell at every stage of the work, and to Sara and our beautiful son Gregorio Matteo this dissertation is wholeheartedly dedicated.

Chapter One

Contextualizing Dante's Negotiations with the Medieval Florentine Narrative Construction of Collective Memory

This chapter provides the framework for the interpretive close readings of selected Dantean texts throughout the dissertation, with a focus on Dante's reshaping of materials relating to Florentine history, especially, though not exclusively, chronicles produced in his native city from the early thirteenth century onwards. This chapter introduces the Medieval Latin *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae*, which was likely Dante's most important source regarding his city's foundation.¹ I place this text within two complementary and cross-pollinating contexts. The first is the historical context of the rise of medieval Florence, along with the political circumstances which favored this chronicle's compilation. The second is theoretical, arguing that the *Chronica* can be read as an example of what modern social sciences have termed 'collective memory.' In so doing, this chapter opens up the broader and controversial field of formation and control of memory, history and identity in its historical context. These two issues remain central to the interpretation of Dante's poetry as well, especially his references to Florence.

Of course, a keystone of this project is the influence on Dante's oeuvre of his sense of belonging to Florence, shaped by his having been born, grown up and taken part in the leading medieval Tuscan commune.² Florence, like other Italian communes before it (most notably, Genoa and Pisa), produced civic narratives that forged both collective memory and individual identity. Dante's direct and indirect contact with these local narratives is corroborated by scholarship connecting Dante's writings to communal intertexts.³ By 'direct' contact, I refer to civic texts which Dante had access to in Florence. For instance, as I will explain further in this chapter, not only was the *Chronica* likely used as a didactic tool to teach Latin,⁴ but it also acquired wider popularity and circulation when it was vernacularized in the second half of the thirteenth century. By 'indirect' contact, I refer to the numerous oral re-elaborations, amplifications and distortions which undoubtedly took place within thirteenth-century Florence.

While such oral productions have inevitably been lost, Dante's vignette representing virtuous Florentine women in the private space of their homes provides a famous reference to their ubiquity within every household and, by extension, to their significant role in shaping individual identity, beginning in very early childhood:

L'una vegghiava a studio della culla,
e, consolando, usava l'idioma
che prima i padri e le madri trastulla;
l'altra, traendo a la rocca la chioma,
favoleggiava con la sua famiglia
d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma. (*Paradiso* XV, 121-126)

¹ The intrinsic importance of the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae* notwithstanding, today the Latin text survives only in three manuscripts, while eleven manuscripts still conserve a vernacular version also known as *Il libro fiesolano*. An overview of the philological issues regarding this chronicle is in Colette Gros, "La plus ancienne version de *Il libro fiesolano*" (11-17), which also includes the vernacular text. Another overview is presented in Riccardo Chellini's critical edition of the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae* (1-19).

² Most famously, the poet defined himself as *florentinus natione non moribus* in introducing himself, for instance, in *Epistola* VI, addressing *scelestissimis Florentinis intrinsecis* after his exile.

³ John Barnes' "Dante's Knowledge of Florentine History" and the sixth chapter of Riccardo Chellini's critical edition of the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae* provide many precise intertextual analogues and thorough bibliographic references. Many parts of this dissertation rely extensively on their research.

⁴ Chellini *Chronica* 128-129. If his hypothesis is as correct as it is persuasive, the *Chronica* was employed in thirteenth-century Florence as a didactic tool alongside the standard Psalms and Donatus' commentaries.

The presence of stories “d’i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma”⁵ within this idyllic reconstruction of eleventh-century Florence imbues it with an additional layer of meaning. This remarkable episode within Cacciaguida’s *laudatio temporis acti* weaves together the formation of Florentine identity with a fictional staging of the oral transmission of such narratives, emphasizing the mutually reinforcing and enriching nature of oral and written memories.

My preliminary effort to interpret this interweaving revolves around at least two lines of thought. The first requires a reconstruction of such oral ramifications to the extent that they may or may not derive from a specific written source: along these lines, Cacciaguida’s speech offers a reconstruction of the historical environment which Dante’s fictional account nostalgically sought to recover from a reactionary standpoint. Of course, readers may well question the extent to which this reconstruction is historically accurate. This inquiry is very likely a dead end; as Le Goff states, “the ‘popular’ or rather ‘folklore’ social memory remains almost completely beyond our grasp.”⁶ Indeed, Dante’s highly formalized and ideologically charged fiction further complicates the lack of historical evidence.

The second line of thought puts aside the issue of the modalities of oral transmission of these foundational narratives, focusing rather on the role of the written civic texts, with an emphasis on the *Chronica*, in Dante’s negotiation with Florentine history. Indeed, we do not know whether the above cited passage from *Paradiso* XV alludes to an oral tradition, converging and cross-pollinating with a written one whose continued presence in Florence during his lifetime may have allowed him to experience it directly. It may instead refer to an irretrievably lost oral tradition inextricably linked to the moral and political values which in Dante’s view had disappeared along with it. The latter option might imply that the surviving written narratives provided a key to the social, political and spiritual recovery of the commune itself, within the context of Dante’s idealization of the full restoration of imperial power in the Italian peninsula.

Nevertheless, because the *Chronica*’s anti-imperial undertone is clearly at odds with Dante’s political vision, it should be interpreted in light of Dante’s irreconcilably polarized feelings towards his native Florence. In fact, Cacciaguida’s sentimental description of the intimate spaces of the past make clear his role as mouthpiece for the poet’s harsh rebuke of Florence’s evil deeds during his own age. Indeed, through the centuries, readers of the *Commedia* have frequently remarked on the ambivalence reflected in Dante’s post-exile works and distinctively permeating his major poem in many other passages which alternate between condemnation and fondness.⁷

From an autobiographical point of view, Amilcare Iannucci and others have pointed out the importance of the passages referring to Florence, noting that this theme may constitute one of three main threads of the poem, along with his intellectual and spiritual growth and his ‘love’ relationship with Beatrice (219). Dante’s bitter condemnation of Florence (the ‘infernal city’ *par excellence* – a city, indeed, founded by Lucifer himself: see *Par.* IX, 127-29) has been extensively discussed from the point of view of his political thought. However, his poetry sometimes reflects this emotional complexity in intermingled ways which are not consistently discernible. Dante’s ambivalence is clearly mirrored in the commentary tradition, which has given rise to readings ranging from one emotional pole to the other.⁸ To cite just one example, Dante’s memories of Florence, a city he both

⁵ As I will discuss extensively later in the chapter, this is also prominent in the *Chronica*.

⁶ Jacques Le Goff *History and Memory* 68. The specificity of oral and written history in the Middle Ages is discussed in pp. 131-132.

⁷ Claire Honess in *From Florence to the Heavenly City* takes Florence as a starting place in tracing Dante’s notion of the city from its earthly, civic idea to the heavenly Jerusalem: “[t]he ambivalence of Dante’s attitude towards his native city is so much of a commonplace as to scarcely need reiterating” (1). Nonetheless, this ambivalence still represents a necessary starting point on which to build arguments on Dante’s relationship with Florence. Honess’ book is also a fundamental resource for bibliographical references on Dante and politics, with a focus on his treatment of the civic environment, which I will extensively discuss in the chapters that follow.

⁸ See e.g. the debate around the meaning of v.12 in *Inf.* XXVI, “ché più mi graverà, com’ più m’attempo,” referred to the expected punishment of Florence evoked by prophecy from the first verse of the canto, which has been interpreted over time around two poles: Dante’s lamenting the belatedness of such a revenge (especially by the ancient

hated and loved, oscillate between the controversial political events which unjustly led him to exile and the sweetness derived from the familiar civic environment to which he hoped to return, as exemplified dramatically in *Par. XXV*, 1-12 (“con altra voce omai, con altro vello/ ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte/ del mio battesimo prenderò ’l cappello”).

Furthermore, such a biographical and historical representation of Florence, already complex in itself, should be interpreted in relation to the multi-layered texture which characterizes the body of the poem, requiring a broader contextualization for each episode, image, verse and even single word. In sum, at issue are Dante’s authorial voice present in the whole poem and in his other works, the cultural context in which these works were written and which they shaped in turn, and the encyclopedia of knowledge available at that time – poetical, philosophical, theological, scientific and historical – which was subsumed by the *poema sacro*. Even more fundamentally, up to now scholars have dealt with the necessity for a global interpretation of the foundational underpinnings of Dante’s poetic and cultural world. The horizon resulting from their various interpretations has shed new light on many passages within the grand scheme of the poem “al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra” (*Par. XXV*, 2), a poem that in its author’s words at once reflects on and transcends human history.

Dante and history: a selected review of secondary literature

Dante’s poetic re-elaboration of history, which has received special attention in American scholarship, has been addressed primarily in discussions of the theological framework of his sense of history. Any serious attempt to examine Dante’s relationship with history must be grounded in that critical context. Giuseppe Mazzotta’s *Dante, Poet of the Desert* remains to this day the most important study of Dante and the theology of history, especially the sixth chapter “Allegory: Poetics of the Desert,” which affirms that “Dante’s allegory intends to provide a theological scheme by which the world of reality, history and the self can be intelligible in God’s providential plan” (237). Mazzotta takes the Incarnation as the pivotal historical event underlying the *Commedia*, and he places it within the model of the biblical Exodus as developed by Singleton. However, he stands in partial disagreement with the earlier interpretative efforts of Singleton, Auerbach, Sarolli, Charity, and others, insofar as they tended to reduce the overall meaning of the poem to “prophecy or political theology or spiritual intellectual conversion” (236).

Moreover, Mazzotta sees such readings as reflecting the hermeneutical polarization of allegory of the poets and allegory of the theologians, which had up to then dominated the debate on how the historicity of the letter of the *Commedia* should be read, and which his readings aim to overcome:

Textual ambiguities are repressed in favor of univocal truth and the acknowledged polysemy of Dante’s poem is viewed to describe the steps in a hierarchy of fixed and stable meanings. Thus, allegory appears as the wrapping in which experience is packed, but the disguises can be penetrated by the application of the right exegetical tools. While these critical perspectives cannot be dismissed as wrong, they are nonetheless partial ... (236-237)

Thus, the resulting question which directly pertains to my investigations as well is: how can these conflicting interpretations be integrated? Going beyond what he considers reductionist approaches of previous scholarship, Mazzotta claims for himself a better recognition of the complexity of Dante’s poetic word. In so doing, Mazzotta acknowledges the “possibility of error” of “the theological structure” (237). He presents many instances of Dante’s awareness of his poetry’s

commentators) and the deep sense of affection for his city that becomes more present as the poet gets older (especially from the Romanticism onwards).

multi-vocal resonances, as revealed by the ambiguous pattern in which metaphors are enacted in his poem: “This wavering ... describes, rather, the bind within which the voice of the poet is forever caught and disrupts the sense of a stable continuity between reality and its representation” (237).

Thus, Mazzotta’s “desert” represents “the radical emblem of history in the *Divine Comedy*” (13): history is seen as a repository of characters, events, and myths from which the poet draws and re-signifies polysemically within the context of his theology and, in so doing, he “warns us against acquiescing in the illusory stability of this world and tells us that history is the place where exiles work and wait” (13). In fact, when Mazzotta wants to exemplify Dante’s treatment of history after his methodological premises, his first choice is not drawn from one of the moments in the *Commedia* in which poetry vertiginously negotiates with an account of controversial facts of contemporary history in Florence or elsewhere in Italy. Rather, he begins with *Purgatorio* X (237-254), reading the exemplary images of humility carved on the cliff as they “unfold the allegory of history and enact a compressed synopsis of salvation history” (238). In other words, Mazzotta’s “desert” of history lies in a sort of gray area where textual hermeneutics, Christian theology, historical and mythical events come together and ultimately present an exemplary spiritual model to the reader. He thus leaves little space for developing Dante’s sense of contemporary history as a part of his communal identity as a Florentine citizen, with reference to an earthly experience rooted in the context of a specific time and place.

Interestingly, however, the only Florentine insertion in Mazzotta’s approach to history is the treatment of the cultural and political role of the historical Brunetto Latini within the deceptive oration of Ulysses in *Inferno* XXVI. In fact, to demonstrate that the episode deals with “the process of *paideia*, the redemptive act of fashioning man’s moral life” (75-76), Mazzotta places it in the context of the role of rhetoric for political education, linking it with Brunetto’s role as Dante’s mentor. In particular, he shows the literal correspondences with Brunetto’s description of “the origins of the city of life in terms of a rhetorical process” in his *La rettorica*, “a handbook of political education” (76), which partially translates and comments Cicero’s *De Inventione*, for Dante’s generation of politically active Florentine citizens.

Mazzotta shows that, in the wake of Cicero, Brunetto creates a “myth of repetition” insofar as he enacts the pattern of “the emergence of the political order in the gift of language as the fundamental tool of man’s presence to himself and to the world” (78), a vision sharply contrasting with Dante’s representation of “Ulysses leading his men to final disaster” (78) through his morally twisted though powerfully persuasive rhetoric. It is not the historically rooted communal context in which Brunetto and Dante operated, but the theoretically foundational matter of Dante’s poetic language and its interpretation which pervades Mazzotta’s book:

For Dante the failure of political rhetoric does not depend simply on his [Ulysses’?] inability to make crucial moral distinctions, but on something prior: the fundamental rupture between truth and language which is caught up in the world of contingency. In this sense, fraud is not simply the sin of Ulysses, but the very condition of the discourse (82).

Thus, beginning with theology and complicating the reading of the poem through rhetoric, Mazzotta acknowledges “the fundamental rupture of language and truth,” that is, Dante’s awareness of the possibility of deception embedded in his own poetic language, and proposes the recognition of the complexities of such a gap and the instability of the meaning that pose a major critical challenge for readers. Although Mazzotta’s concept of “instability of meanings” remains crucial to a dynamic reading of the *Commedia*, it acquires an even more specific and complex set of social, temporal and individual meanings when applied to passages where Dante deals with Florence, requiring a renewed discussion of the appropriate interpretive tools.

To this purpose, the second half of this chapter presents a theoretical framework which opens up an ‘internal’ reading of the Dantean text to the ‘external’ influences brought to bear by the forces of collective memory in his age. Special emphasis is devoted to the shaping of collective

memory through literary narratives, of which Dante is a paramount example. The resulting texts in turn serve as a powerful creative force within which collective memory is continually reshaped, refashioning the relationship between individuals and society. Of course, a focus on the rhetorical and interpretive complexities that a theology of history implies is not the only way in which scholars have examined Dante's reshaping of history in his major poem. Blending political and theological points of view, Charles T. Davis' essay "Dante's Vision of History" unfolds Dante's "coherent conception of what he took to be God's providential plan" (23), pointing out the "dominant" role which "the *populus romanus*" played in it (23), from Augustus to the German emperors through the process of the *translatio imperii*: "[t]hose who supported Rome's temporal and spiritual mission were more Roman than those merely born within her walls" (23).

Thus, Davis selects a handful of passages from the *Commedia* where history serves to flesh out Dante's political ideology, beginning from *Inferno* I, in which Virgil is not only Dante's "stylistic "maestro" and "autore" (24), but also, "as his first words make clear, is Dante's historical master as well" (24), alluding not only to the historicity of the *res gestae* narrated in the *Aeneid*, but also to the assumption "that God had willed Rome's conquest and universal power ... and that he had revealed this fact to Aeneas and Virgil" (25). Davis claims that, from the very beginning of the poem, it is clear that the *Aeneid*'s authority on Roman history parallels the Bible's authority on universal and eschatological history: both narrate historical events revealed by God to their authors (26-27). According to Davis, this is the reason why, for instance, Dante quotes the *Aeneid* and the Bible in the same way, that is, as historically true accounts.⁹

Following this line of reasoning, Davis argues that Dante distances himself from the neo-platonic, allegoric tradition of the medieval readings of the Vergilian "Aeneas' supernatural journey" (27), dwelling instead on its historicity, with his actual body ("Tu dici che di Silvio il parente, / corruttibile ancora, ad immortale / secolo andò, e fu sensibilmente." *Inferno* II, 13-15), significantly juxtaposed with Saint Paul's Christian journey, which is also historical insofar as it is narrated in the Bible ("Andovvi poi lo vas d'elezione, / per recarne conforto a quella fede / ch'è principio a la via di salvazione. / Ma io, perché venirvi? O chi 'l concede?/ Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono ... " *Inferno* II, 28-32).¹⁰ Thus, relying on his memory and on the Muses' help slightly earlier in the same canto (ll. 3-9), Dante claims that his journey happened historically, as did the journeys of Aeneas and Paul before him, and he takes poetic responsibility for retelling it according to the Grace he received in undertaking it.

This said, Davis is not primarily focused on the tensions between the vision's proclaimed truthfulness and its patent fictional construction, as developed for example by Barolini's *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, nor the allegorical implications of the 'divinely inspired' historicity of Vergil's *Aeneid* in Dante's *Commedia*, as developed for example by Hollander's *Il Virgilio dantesco. Tragedia nella "Commedia,"* nor, as in the case of Mazzotta, "Dante's systematic correlation of the secular and the sacred strands of history" (6), with its implicit interpretive rhetorical complexities.¹¹ Instead, Davis' extensive discussion of the prophecy of the *Veltro* as related to Henry VII, which preserves only one of Mazzotta's two strands cited above, insofar as it is concerned exclusively with earthly politics, acknowledges that "Dante's view becomes

⁹ In particular, Davis develops a suggestion first presented by Padoan, pointing out the medieval belief that Vergil had received such a revelation, as also displayed in his famous Fourth Eclogue, from the Sibylline oracles (26-27).

¹⁰ In *Il Virgilio dantesco. Tragedia nella "Commedia"* Hollander instead interprets the figure of Virgil as dramatically tragic in his inability to acknowledge the Christian revelation (7-12, and *passim*). In so doing, whereas Davis and Hollander agree on Dante's use in the *Commedia* (though not, of course, in the *Convivio*!) of the *Aeneid* as a de-allegorized historical text, Davis' hypothesis differs from Hollander's treatment of Virgil insofar as it acknowledges a parallelism between the truthfulness of the historical accounts of both the *Aeneid* and the Bible.

¹¹ Mazzotta *Dante*. Strikingly, although claiming to harmonize the "secular and sacred strands of history" (6), Mazzotta's reading almost completely excludes Florentine history from this dialectic between them. The harmonization claimed by Mazzotta seems exclusively directed towards a "profoundly Christian dimension of history" (7), in the sense that "Dante constantly vindicates the importance of earthly life, but he also warns us not to mistake the shadowy and insubstantial domain of temporal existence for the true things to come" (7).

comprehensible, however, if we think of him as a theologian of history, looking nostalgically backward to the first Augustus, and hopefully forward to the second” (36).

The distinct approaches of Mazzotta and Davis to Dante’s historical vision clearly overlap in one respect, namely, their recognition of Dante’s highly dramatic sense of earthly history and its abyssal distance from the ideal, peaceful condition embodied by the Roman Empire under Augustus, which not only “coincided with the coming of Christ” (36), but also allowed it. Such an ideal condition would enable humankind to enjoy happiness on earth as a prelude to subsequent heavenly beatitude.¹² Alongside the near-apocalyptic sense of history in Dante’s oeuvre, deriving at least in part from his own experience of exile in the context of contemporary politics, his vision of history implies a pattern of idealizing those aspects of the past which resonate with his values (as seen, for example, in Cacciaguیدا’s episode) in dynamic tension with present political and spiritual turmoil, along with the prophetic tension towards a future re-establishment of an ideal earthly condition.¹³ This Dantean sense of history, rooted in the conception of history of Isidore of Seville, Hugh of St. Victor and Augustine, as pointed out by Mazzotta (66-69), has been acknowledged at least partially even by scholars with very different standpoints, as for example John Freccero who reads the *Commedia* as a spiritual autobiography in the wake of Augustine’s *Confessions*, pointing out that the coherence of universal history “may be perceived only from the perspective of eschatology” (26).

Thus, to summarize my central question, how does the history of Florence as perceived by its thirteenth-century citizens, or in other words, the ways in which their collective memory works and is embodied in individual instances, fit into the pattern alluding to the medieval cliché of the exemplary value of history in a Christian perspective? Put more simply, how, if at all, do the eschatological Christian conception of history and the transmission of a collective memory overlap and cross-pollinate? A critical response to this question requires us to transcend the hermeneutical tools provided thus far by Dante scholarship and explore new theoretical models which, stepping into the realm of social sciences, provide readers with fresh insights consistent with the cultural objects in question.

In fact, whereas the theological and political perspectives have been widely discussed by scholars dealing with Dante’s sense of history, much less attention has been paid to the complex ways in which the historical narratives rooted in Florence’s everyday urban environment and therefore integral to its collective memory, are reflected in and inform his oeuvre. On this basis, I focus on a set of pertinent instances by means of which Dante’s *Commedia*, with reference to his other works, engages with and, in many cases, reacts against the strategies already enacted by the Florentine commune’s attempt to construct a new collective identity during the thirteenth century, with forays into the fourteenth century. In particular, as Chapter Two shows, especially during the peak of Brunetto’s career, when the *primo popolo* ruled, the Florentine Republic did so through the narrative means of civic historiography and other publicly displayed instances of its self-representation – as might be expected, usually in positive if not celebratory terms, but with complexities that might have drawn the poet’s attention.

¹² Mazzotta *Dante*: “Dante’s perception of the chaos of history is, in a real sense, more tragic than Augustine’s. The harsh reality of history has become for him an intolerable nightmare, and he knows that nothing can shelter man’s very self from history’s sinister violence” (7). See also: Davis “Dante’s Vision of History”: “In 1314, however, when the issue of the conclave was still in doubt, [Dante’s] letter to the Italian cardinals was already colored with deep pessimism, with a sense that history had gone awry ... The result of the conclave must have made even stronger Dante’s belief that he was witnessing in his own lifetime an immense, indeed apocalyptic, outpouring of evil. Dante thought that the end of history was near” (33).

¹³ Davis “Dante’s Vision of History”: “Dante’s vision of history was therefore both archaic and eschatological. It looked back to an idealized past when an all-powerful empire served the common good and a poor and fervent church imitated Christ. It looked forward to the restoration of that empire and church under the long-prophesied ruler of the Christian and Roman peoples who would defeat the temporarily triumphant forces of evil and foreshadow the final victory of the heavenly emperor Christ” (40).

Far from proposing a new framework for a hermeneutical reinterpretation of the poem as a whole, my endeavor takes a historically and theoretically contextualized point of view. As such, it aims at reading selected Dantean passages from the standpoint of the common autobiographical thread which ‘environmentally’ links the poet to his native Florence. In particular, from Chapter Two onward, my readings show how the rhetorical device of the palinode, especially as developed by Albert Ascoli’s *Dante and the Making of the Modern Author*. Ascoli develops the issue of the relationships between authorial self-construction and history,¹⁴ shedding light on the ways in which the poet deals with the historical collective memory he participated in, and then shaped in turn.

More precisely, Ascoli convincingly links palinodic recantation and history, stating clearly that, although “through the use of the palinode Dante created an ideal, retrospective order within his *oeuvre*, reinforcing the impression that he has acquired a timeless *auctoritas*” (60), it is necessary to re-examine “the Dantean palinode ... reconsidering both the rhetorical organization of Dante’s texts and their character as both products and interpretations of history,” to better understand the peculiarity of Dante’s recantatory use of history (280). In this regard, the examples of textual repetition between *Monarchia* and *Commedia* that Ascoli discusses show “how differences between Dantean texts do not necessarily signal a directed teleological itinerary, but often betoken the adaptation of similar materials to different rhetorical and historical occasions and needs” (60). Thus, I integrate a thorough discussion of the recantatory passages in which the Florentine collective identity, especially as expressed in its early narrative chronicles, emerges and it is dealt with by Dante.

Comparing the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae* and Dante’s works

From a historical standpoint, the reshaping of a collective identity lies at the very heart of the foundation of communes in northern and central Italy from the second half of the eleventh century onwards. More precisely, such an enterprise served as a cultural attempt at political self-justification against a complex legal and political backdrop. There was the largely unresolved opposition between, on the one hand, the old top-down order — legally guaranteed by Roman and canon law, and managed in the name of the Emperor by either a secular (a nobleman) or a religious (a bishop) authority who represented him — and, on the other hand, a new social and economic dynamism that emerged and slowly but inexorably evolved into a local, citizen-driven and republican government, rooted in common law and daily practices. During the thirteenth century, these representatives of the nobility and clergy, whose power as standard-bearers of imperial control continued to dwindle, tended more and more to compromise with the ever-growing and economically active mercantile class, with whom they increasingly intermingled. Insofar as it represented the politics of the newly established commune, the writing of the *Chronica* was integral to this process.

From the point of view of social history, John Hyde points out that the features common to the development of Italian communes must “be sought not in the state but in a culture supported by a distinctive form of society.”¹⁵ In other words, Hyde persuasively argues that what was specifically Italian within the medieval world consisted in a strong urban network inherited from Roman antiquity, which in turn reinforced a sense of proudly asserted local self-governance. On this basis, one may wonder precisely which “culture supported [this] distinctive form of society.” The communal chronicles offer some clues in answering this question, to the extent that they provide a deep and first-hand account of a shared and well recognized culture, both reflecting and perpetuating the distinctive identities of civic communities.

¹⁴ In particular, on palinode and history, see Ascoli *Dante and the Making* 274-300.

¹⁵ Curiously, Hyde’s argument is explicitly inspired by “[t]he breadth of Muratori’s [Enlightenment] vision of medieval Italy, as a single culture existing with local variations in a multiplicity of states” (5).

In fact, thirteenth-century Italian communes felt a strong need to create their own history. The emerging narratives reflect an ambition to develop a voice at once distinct from and in continuity with that of Church and Empire. The more or less sporadic gathering of ‘facts’ occurred usually but not always in accordance with the annalistic model, both of the past and the contemporary world. It resulted in the construction of a tradition based on well-established sources, selected because of their ideological function rather than historical reliability. In other words, the politically justified refashioning of the communal collective identity took shape in the explicit creation of communal narratives in order to control what may be defined as a new ‘collective memory,’ which in turn served as an implicit ideological and legal foundation for the commune itself.

The *Chronica*, the earliest medieval Florentine civic chronicle that still survives today, provides the necessary context for the civic foundational myths that shaped both the collective memory and the identity of Florentine citizens. This brief but dense text, whose most recent critical edition takes up no more than seventeen pages of a modern *octavo* volume, is cautiously believed to have been written during the first three decades of the thirteenth century.¹⁶ There is evidence that it enjoyed vast success in shaping the Florentine commune’s political and historical identity, at least until the fifteenth century,¹⁷ as also exemplified by its vernacularizations. Furthermore, along with other lesser known chronicles, the *Chronica* served as a source for the section in Giovanni Villani’s *Nuova cronica* on early Florentine history.¹⁸ Chellini’s most significant contribution to my project is his compelling argument that although Villani had access to the *Chronica*, it was his reading of it through Dante which mediated his understanding of this text.¹⁹

Today, scholars concur that the early anonymous chronicle presents its narratives as documented history, in accordance with medieval practice of historiography founded on ancient and medieval *auctoritates*. At the same time, however, scholars point out that the chronicler displays the intent to manipulate his sources in order to justify the Florentine claim to a hegemonic control over Tuscany, as exemplified by an emphasis on the relationships between Florence, the Tuscan territory, the papacy and the empire. That is to say, as Rubinstein puts it, the *Chronica* can be considered “a valuable source for the knowledge of contemporary political thought.”²⁰ Far from the annalistic model of a mere record of facts, this text recounts Florence’s foundation in the context of ancient tales from the perspective of universal history, from Adam on to the dawn of the thirteenth century.

To our modern eyes, the chronicler blends history and myth, for example, shifting seamlessly from Florence’s mythical foundation to the historically documented destruction of Fiesole in 1125, although still cloaking it in the aura of legend. It is useful to divide the text into two parts, separated by an evident *caesura* on the basis of their narrative content. The first part of the *Chronica* epitomizes universal history from Adam to the enduring glory of the Roman Empire,

¹⁶ Chellini *Chronica* 116-117: on the basis of historical and philological reasons elucidated with great critical competence, Chellini establishes as a *terminus post quem* the year 1183, and as a *terminus ante quem* the year 1235. However, according to the erudite arguments developed by the other scholars whom Chellini cites, the first decades of the thirteenth century seem to be the most likely period.

¹⁷ It must be noted that such a success, witnessed by the presence of the *Chronica* in several manuscripts and in its vernacularization as well as its references in some latter chronicles, was discussed by other chroniclers dealing with Florence from the second half of the thirteenth century through the first decades of the fourteenth, which clearly do not utilize the ancient *Chronica* as a source. A list of these chronicles appears in Chellini 147-149.

¹⁸ Chellini *Chronica* 2-6: the editor points out that this chronicle was copied by Giovanni Boccaccio in the so-called Zibaldone Laurenziano (BLMF, plut. 29, 8), and, roughly during the same span of time, it served as a consistent reference point for Giovanni Villani’s *Nuova cronica*, whose historical authority eventually eclipsed that of the former text. Villani’s work was the most successful and authoritative fourteenth-century Florentine chronicle.

¹⁹ The most interesting example of this is that of the Statue of Mars in *Inferno* XIII, 143-151, discussed in Chapter Three. I will discuss Villani’s indebtedness to Dante in detail later on in the chapter.

²⁰ Nicolai Rubinstein “The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence. A Study in Mediaeval Historiography” 207. In this foundational article, Rubinstein is the first to trace the ideological interconnections between the main texts of the chronicles’ tradition. See also Chellini *Chronica* 113-132.

and can be further subdivided into a predominantly Greek-centered theme and a predominantly Vergil-centered one. The second part returns to the Roman Empire, beginning from the perspective of a rather marginalized Christendom, and then inserts Florence's foundation and its history up to the thirteenth century within the framework of its Roman legacy.

The most defining feature of the *Chronica*, in terms of both its binding narrative thread and its success as a text, is the motif of Florence's *romanitas*. Indeed, the texts it influenced over the centuries, in particular Sanzanome's *Gesta Florentinorum*,²¹ represented Florence as having inherited Rome's earthly political role, further emphasizing the theme of Florence's foundation by Rome at the apex of Roman power. As is well known, Dante picks up on this theme and heavily problematizes it in his poetry.²² To better understand Dante's refashioning of this tradition in his *Commedia* and elsewhere, this chapter presents a brief exposition of the events narrated in the *Chronica* itself, focusing in particular on the account of Florence's foundation. My summary highlights some details which might have served as sources for Dante's poetry. In so doing, I open up new critical possibilities for the commentary tradition by pointing out these potential sources, both when they shed new light on Dantean passages and when they give rise to a broader interpretation. As a result, my reading, as already anticipated, reveals two levels of connections: those internal to the poem itself, and those between the poem, its wide range of literary sources and the role of Florentine collective memory within it.

Greek and Vergilian worlds in the *Chronica*: setting the stage for the connection between Florence and Rome

The *Chronica* begins with materials drawn mainly from the Greek world as narrated by brief Latin synopses of Greek sources available during the Middle Ages, namely Dares of Phrygia and Dictys of Crete. A short prologue declares the aim to recover for contemporaries a series of heretofore forgotten "utiles ac delectabiles ystorias," beginning with ancient historiographers whose names the text withholds.²³ After covering the 3184 years from Adam to the tower of Babel, at which point the Assyrian Ninus, "qui fuit primus rex," contemporary to Abraham, conquers the whole world ("toto orbe"), the *Chronica* describes the division of the world into three parts: Asia, Africa, and Europe, as a consequence of the fall of the Babel tower and the fragmentation of language.²⁴

The text then goes on to contextualize the foundation of Fiesole, which it identifies as the very first European city, against the backdrop of medieval European geography. More precisely, it

²¹ Sanzanome "Gesta Florentinorum ab anno 1125 ad annum 1231" 1-34.

²² Chellini *Chronica* 133-135; 145. See also the beginning of Compagni's *Cronica*: "[L]e ricordanze dell' antiche istorie lungamente hanno stimolata la mente mia di scrivere i pericolosi avvenimenti non prosperevoli, i quali ha sostenuti *la nobile città figliuola di Roma* molti anni" (3, emphasis added).

²³ John Barnes "Dante's Knowledge of Florentine History": "[I]t is unclear whether the version that has come down to us was compiled all at once from various remote sources, or whether it is partly based on earlier compilations which have been lost. As the evidence stands, however, the text is quite a considerable compilation, taking material from at least half-a-dozen sources, some of them ancient and some less so" (96), and then he lists the supposed sources, with different degrees of likelihood, direct and indirect sources: Hyginus' *Fabulae*; Dares of Phrygia and Dictys of Crete's accounts of the Trojan wars; Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*; Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*; Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana*; Paulus Orosius' *Historiae Adversus Paganos*; Isidore of Seville's *Etimologiae*; Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. Barnes here usefully epitomizes Otto Hartwig's *Quellen and Furschungen*, I (XX-XXIV), and Rubinstein's "The Beginnings" (199-201).

²⁴ It is worth noting the parallel between this and Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, I,vi-ix, where Dante discusses the linguistic consequences of the Tower of Babel. Among the areas in which these two texts overlap, the discussion of Attila in II, vi 5 stands out, since the names of Attila and Totila were often confused during medieval times. I discuss Dante's negotiations with this tradition and these overlaps in Chapter Two. It is worth noting that the division of the world into Africa, Asia and Europe was completely in line with the symbolic and visual representation of the world during medieval times, in which the three continents were represented as parts of a circle in which Europe took up the upper half and Africa and Asia each take up equal parts of the lower half.

traces Europe's boundaries by citing selected landmarks, taking as a beginning and ending point the port of "Branduxium" – the modern Italian city of Brindisi, which held a multi-layered historical importance. To begin with, it was the port connecting the Italian peninsula to Greece in antiquity. It was also the place in which Virgil famously died before he could reach Greece to refine his major poem, whose plot the *Chronica* subsequently summarizes. Finally, during the Middle Ages it was the point of departure for crusaders headed for the Holy Land.

During the period in which the *Chronica* was written, Brindisi evoked a rich multiplicity of meanings in learned readers and a less historically complex but nonetheless quite charged set of resonances. Brindisi functions as a sort of microcosm for the *Chronica* as a whole, in the sense that the secular and Christian worlds and values contained within this city's history are reflected and expanded within the structure and contents of the chronicle. After this charged geographical allusion, the chronicle identifies Fiesole's mythical founders, namely Atlas and his wife Electra, who follow their advisor Apollo's counsel in selecting the best location in the continent according both to astral influences and the salubrious properties of its physical features. In Fiesole, Atlas and Electra beget three sons and a daughter: Italus, from whom the region will be subsequently called "Ytalia"; Dardanus, who becomes the first horse rider and soldier; Siccanus, who goes to Sicily and conquers it; and the beautiful Candatia. Vying for primacy in the region, Italus and Dardanus ask their gods for an oracle, and receive the response that Dardanus has to leave. He accordingly moves eastward to Phrygia with his sister Candatia and Apollo advises him to found a city which he named Dardania, where Dardanus gives rise to a royal genealogy.²⁵

The first of many genealogical threads in the work's chronological structure is introduced at this point: Dardanus begets Herittonius, who in turn begets Troyus, regarded as such a virtuous king that, after his death, the citizens change the city's name to "Troy," leaving Dardania as the name of the main city gate. Troyus begets two sons, Ilyon and Ansaracus. Then, Ilyon begets Laumedon, whose times coincide with Hercules and Jason's expedition to Colchis to win the Golden Fleece. The chronicle does not explain King Laumedon's thoughtless refusal to allow the Argonauts to rest in Troy from their travels, in retaliation for which they attack and destroy the city. Compounding the damage, one of Hercules' men, Talamonis, abducts Laumedon's daughter, Ysion.

It should be noted that, recounting the traditional version of the history based on the *res gestae* of a few powerful heroes, the *Chronica* also introduces the theme of the arbitrariness of monarchic power by implicitly contrasting Troyus and Laumedon, assuming that the whim of a single head of the city can lead either to the flourishing or the destruction of the whole community, which here has no voice in the matter. In contrast with the representation of the damage dealt to this *civitas* by monarchy, the Trojan citizens appreciate King Troyus so much that they take the initiative to name the city after him, emphasizing the citizens' political power in shaping the city's identity when there is a harmonious relationship with the monarchy.

Troy is subsequently restored by Priamus, Laumedon's son and Ysion's brother, who then goes on to marry Hecuba, with whom he begets several sons and daughters, most memorably Hector, Paris and Troilus. In order to avenge the former destruction of Troy and the abduction of his aunt Ysion, Paris flees to Greece, abducts Helena, wife of king Menelaus, and plunders Menelaus' city. Predictably, Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon carry on a wrathful retaliation on a grand scale: they go "cum multitudine maxima Grecorum et aliarum gentium" on a fleet to attack Troy, which they besiege "per X annos et sex menses, et XV dies." The *Chronica* laconically relates that the Greeks "de nocte, cum dolositate maxima" gain entrance to the city and destroy it, killing the vast majority of its inhabitants, whose destiny is once again implicitly connected with the disastrous political decisions made by their oligarchy. Strikingly, no more details are included, not even the

²⁵ The modern reader might wonder why the *Chronica* does not explain why Dardanus moves eastward, perceiving this detail as an example of narrative inconsistency. A similar pattern occurs elsewhere in the text, for example when Paris attacks Menelaus' city among all the Greek cities available. In these cases, following a medieval conception of history, the anonymous chronicler takes for granted connections with the mythological tradition based on the authority of his sources.

Trojan horse episode or Ulysses' name, for example. This episode foreshadows, even on a lexical level, the account of the Ostrogothic king Totila's destruction of Florence, narrated in the second half of the *Chronica*, (to be discussed further on in this chapter): in both cases, the oligarchy whose decisional power is disconnected from the bulk of the citizens fails to do the right thing, thus fostering the destruction of the entire city.²⁶

The *Chronica* now transitions to a sometimes inaccurate summary of the *res gestae* narrated in Vergil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas, a descendant of Ansalocus and the only survivor of the Trojan royal genealogy, "cum XX milibus hominibus" receives permission to flee from his land after making a sacrifice to Minerva. The goddess' oracle directs him and his people to travel by sea to "Ytalia," his ancestor Dardanus' homeland, via the Tiber River. The oracle states clearly that, in that promised land, "per vos seu vestros descendentes maiora fient et acquiruntur quam per vos relinquuntur". Nonetheless, just before the fleet can approach the Tiber's mouth, a tempest drives it astray near the African shores, Aeneas's ship is wrecked and the Trojan hero and his closest companions are benevolently hosted by Dido, queen of Carthage, to whom Aeneas "multum placuit," and thus they linger there "per plura tempora." The chronicle does not explicitly mention Dido and Aeneas' love affair and its dramatic consequences for Dido as does Vergil's poem, but notes that Dido's will notwithstanding ("ea nolente"), the Trojans eventually sail up the Tiber to the city of Albana, governed by King Latinus, whose beautiful daughter Lavinia immediately falls in love with Aeneas. This triggers the indignation of the powerful king Turnus, "qui residebat in partibus ubi nunc est Cortona," who attack the Trojans. During the battle, Aeneas slays Turnus. In the predictable happy ending to the Vergilian part of the chronicle, Aeneas takes Lavinia as his wife and thus gives rise to the Latin genealogy.

In the course of nine generations meticulously listed in the text, this lineage gives rise to "Aremus," who founds a new settlement composed of Albana's citizens "inter montes ubi nunc est Roma."²⁷ He is later killed by a thunderbolt on account of his impiety, in clear and curious contrast with the traditional *pietas* attributed to his ancestor Aeneas by the Vergilian *auctoritas*. It is noteworthy that, beginning with Turnus' deeds, a series of cross-references build a set of comparisons which bridge the legendary past and the modern landscape and place names. Indeed, even Aremus' son, Aventinus, is declared to have died and been buried in a hill of Rome which took his name and retained it down to the anonymous chronicler's times.

The purpose of these rhetorical strategies is, in my opinion, twofold. On the one hand, these trans-historical connections indicate the will to gather a recognizable and reliable set of references, seamlessly modulating between a very distant past represented by Vergil's *Aeneid* and other medieval sources generally believed to be historically true. In other words, here the anonymous chronicler displays his efforts to represent events in a verisimilar manner, in order to substantiate on a geographical, territorial basis the deeds extrapolated from authoritative literary sources. On the other hand, the chronicler implicitly establishes a preliminary and still subtle connection between Roman and Florentine history, which was bound progressively to acquire importance in the course of the subsequent developments of Florentine historiography. It is well known that such a connection left significant traces in Dante's poetry as well, whenever the poet dealt with issues connected with his city's history, as I will discuss in Chapter Two.

The *Chronica* continues tracing the genealogy, from "Aventinus" to Romulus and Remus in the course of four more generations, through Procas, Numitor, and his daughter, the vestal virgin Rea Silvia, who bears her male twins and is condemned to be buried alive. Curiously enough, the

²⁶ This foreshadowing occurs not only on a thematic but also on a lexical level. In fact, the word "dolositate" recurs in both episodes: the Greeks gain access to the city "de nocte, cum dolositate maxima", while Totila gains the trust of Florence's patricians "donando cum dolositate", allowing him to destroy the city from within.

²⁷ The theme of the impiety of a city's founder, especially of Rome, acquires a deeper resonance precisely because it is set in clear contrast with the Vergilian authoritative source. Dante's cult of the Vergilian poetry led him to discard this alternate version of the story, even though the same theme recurs in the foundation of Mantua (*Inferno* XX 52-102), famously narrated by the character of Virgil.

twins and their father (the god Mars), are not named until the end of the section, which culminates in an encomium of the Roman Empire. As is apparent, this reticence can be explained in terms of the overarching pattern of impiety of the city founders. The *Chronica* then recounts the abandonment of the still-unnamed twins along the bank of a river (presumably the Tiber), where they are found and raised by the shepherd Faustulus and his wife Acca Laurentia, here described as a rapacious prostitute, accounting for her nickname of “lupa” (she-wolf). As young men, the twins kill Amulius, who had usurped Alba’s kingship from their grandfather Numitor, and found a new city, “que Roma nomine Romuli fuit postea nominata”. The first part of the *Chronica* ends here, glorifying the Roman “imperium” which “a Romulus exordium habet” and lasting “per sectingendos annos.”

From Florence’s foundation to its contemporary turmoil: the actualization of Florence’s Roman legacy

The *Chronica*’s second part begins with an abrupt reference to the beginning of Christendom in the context of the Roman Empire, summarizing the main events of Christ’s life and the early diffusion of Christianity: His birth, the adoration of the Magi, His baptism by John in the Jordan, His death and resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit to His disciples and their missionary enterprise, with an emphasis on Peter and his martyrdom in Rome, in whose honor a “magna ecclesia” was dedicated, thus establishing Rome as the center of Christianity “tempore domini Octaviani Cesaris Augusti.” Far from being a seamless and modulated narrative strategy, the abrupt insertion of the foundation of Florence into this Christian context somehow sets it apart from the other events narrated in the chronicle, with the possible exception of the naming of Brindisi, with its implicit resonances regarding the crusades.

As made clear from what follows in the text, this insertion is intended to emphasize Florence’s mythical, genealogical connection to Rome. In fact, at this point the chronicle prepares the narrative of the city’s foundation, implying a direct connection between Rome and the newly founded “Florentia”, further specifying that, when the main Christian church was established in Rome, a miraculous fount of olive oil flowed for one entire day near the city, leading to the construction of another famous church in that place, namely Santa Maria in Trastevere. This event is then linked by a clear allusion to Florence’s central role in the region of Tuscia, which extended from Trastevere to the Apennines toward the north.²⁸ Moreover, the name Tuscia is explained in Christian terms referring to the role of incense, Latin *thus*, in the liturgy.

Alongside its role in linking Florence to Rome, this digression regarding Christianity reflects an underlying ambivalence about the Church’s role in the communal economy and society. Indeed, Christianity’s role in the *Chronica* is hegemonic rather than intrinsic in nature, and its ambivalence mirrors that of religion in Italian communes of the time. In fact, on the one hand, the religious establishment wished to participate in civic life, including commerce. On the other hand, there was the religious impulse to place limits on certain practices, such as usurious lending, and, more generally, to restrain the greed associated with an emphasis on commerce.²⁹

Then, setting aside the digression into Christianity, which is nevertheless implicitly woven into the genealogical connections between Florence and Rome, the *Chronica* recounts Catiline’s rebellion against the Roman Senate, his first defeat in the city and his flight with his surviving followers to Tuscia, where he finds shelter and alliance within the city of Fiesole and carries on the civil war from that stronghold. There follows the battle between Catiline and the Roman senator

²⁸ Chellini *Chronica* notes that this geographical reference is precise from the point of view of Roman history (63-64).

²⁹ Augustine Thompson’s *Cities of God* (3-8, and passim) recovers the connections between civic and religious matters within the communal context, insisting on the ways in which this dynamic forged collective memory by means of its symbolic manifestations. In so doing, Thompson criticizes the outlook of social historians such as Hyde who represent civic life as neatly separated from the religious sphere.

Antonius's massive legions, where Antonius eventually defeats Catiline in a classic Pyrrhic victory: so few Roman soldiers survive and go back to Rome with Antonius ("cum XX sociis reversus est Romam luctuosis victoriis") that the Senate, amazed and enraged at such a loss, decide to send the generals Metellus and Florinus "cum maxima multitudine gentium" to eradicate Catiline's forces and regain the complete control over the area.

The Roman legions move aggressively against their enemies, shifting the balance in their own favor. Catiline waits for them outside Fiesole's walls, and a preliminary battle occurs along the Arno River. Night falls and both sides are camped in the Arno Valley on different sides of the river. The Romans, splitting their troops in two parts, each headed by one of the two generals, attack their enemies by surprise from different sides, killing many and forcing the survivors to seek refuge back within Fiesole's walls, a shelter still too strong to be conquered. At this propitious moment, Metellus returns to Rome and Florinus, still camped at the foothill of Fiesole in the Arno Valley, prepares the decisive attack on the stronghold.

But a few nights later, seeking revenge for Florinus' previous massacre, the Faesulans stealthily attack his camp and kill everybody there (including Florinus and his family), eliciting further massive intervention by the Romans and the siege by Caesar himself, assisted by other generals, Macrinus, Gallinus, Ranaldus, Camertes. Indeed, in continuity with the predilection for accounts of place names demonstrated above, the *Chronica* emphasizes the fact that the hills where all these generals set their camps are then named after them. As Fiesole continues to hold out, Caesar dismisses the other generals and swears to single-handedly destroy the stronghold to its foundations. He then establishes a marketplace in the place where Florinus, his family and his troops died.

After Caesar's siege, which lasts "per spatium VIII annorum et sex mensium et IIII dierum," the two sides finally come to an agreement: Fiesole is to be destroyed, and its surviving inhabitants are to relocate to the place where Caesar founded the marketplace in the Arno Valley, "in villa Camartia et in villa Arnina" – the settlement destined to become "Florentia" – and coexist with the Romans. It should be noted that the death of Catiline is mentioned only in a short paragraph at the end of the subsequent section, which narrates Florence's foundation, and is curiously at odds with the assertion that besiegers and besieged "ad hanc concordiam devenerunt," which evokes the image of pacific resolution of the conflict. In fact, it is abruptly reported a few lines after the account of Florence's foundation that the two sides eventually battle in the above-mentioned "campo Piceno," where Catiline dies, and where his surviving followers found Pistoia – a thriving commune when *Chronica* was written, and a traditional rival of Florence's attempts at territorial expansion in Tuscany.

The narrative disruption at this point clearly reveals an ideological investment in recounting 'history' from the proud perspective of Florence as a commune striving for a collective identity. Indeed, this rhetorical strategy is deployed at other points in the text, as seen for example in the chronological disconnection of the summary of early Christianity and Florence's foundation. Moreover, in the passage discussed here, the rhetorical strategy just described is reinforced by another one, namely a fictitious etymology to account for the name of the newly founded city of Pistoia ("civitas Pistorii"), explained in terms of a word play with 'pestilence' ("ibi fuit magna pestilentia ultra modum"). This stigmatization of Florence's enemies on the basis of a fictional etymology is characteristic of the *Chronica* and recurs often.

To emphasize the *Chronica*'s importance in shaping and reflecting Florentine collective memory, it should be noted that it is the only civic chronicle written before Villani's *Nuova cronica* in the first part of the fourteenth century that recounts the founding of Florence. The only other account of Florence's foundation appears briefly in chapter 37 of the first book of Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*, an encyclopedic rather than civic narrative, and is inserted within the summary of universal history, a point developed in Chapter Two in terms of the specificity of its connections with Dante. Chellini, who lists nine civic chronicles written in the time between the anonymous *Chronica* and Villani's *Nuova cronica*, attributes the lack of references to Florence's foundation to a perception

that the events narrated in the *Chronica* were fictional rather than historical in nature.³⁰ In so doing, Chellini fails to identify the sudden emergence of a modern historiographic consciousness that his hypothesis implies. An alternative explanation is that, in aiming to relate events closer to the present, these nine chronicles took for granted the *Chronica*'s account or, in any case, they were not interested either in referring to it or in calling it into question.

Chellini must be acknowledged, however, for recognizing that “[f]u Dante a rivalutare la *Chronica* in poesia, creando i presupposti per la sua riabilitazione storiografica operata da Giovanni Villani.”³¹ More precisely, it is Dante's engagement with certain key passages from the *Chronica* which allowed Villani to incorporate this historiographic material. This raises the question of why Dante devoted such extensive attention to this text, outdated and sometimes blatantly inaccurate from the point of view of both textual citations (most notably from Vergil's *Aeneid*) and narrative consistency. My preliminary answer is that Dante preferred to draw from the wellspring of the collective memory rooted in the Florentine communal tradition in his poetic renderings, with the specific aim of engaging with this tradition, rather than looking for that source because of its historical *auctoritas*, as he did in the case of Vergil's *Aeneid*.

The *Chronica*'s discussion of Caesar's role in Florence's foundation is a central example of material which might have influenced Dante's representation. In fact, after narrating Catiline's defeat and the foundation of the still-nameless new city, the *Chronica* relates Caesar's demand that Florence be named “Caesaria” and enjoy the status as the area's only marketplace (“[Caesar] precepit ut nullus aliqua victualia mercaretur, nisi in loco ubi mortuus fuerat Florini”) – a detail emphasizing the contemporary Florentine commune's commercial worldview, famously and harshly rebuked in the *Commedia*. Defying Caesar's will, the Senate instead decides to name the city after the first person to erect a major structure. By coincidence, however, all of the city's major projects – towers, pavement, “Capitolium” amphitheater, aqueduct etc., “sicut erat in urbe Rome” – are completed on the same day, and because the urban structure is physically modeled on Rome, its mother city, the senators provisionally name its daughter “parva Romula.”

Such a downplaying of Caesar's political role in favor of the republican institution of the Senate alludes to the scarce sympathy the newly established, republican communal power had for the attempts at territorial control in Italy by the Germanic emperors, particularly Frederick Barbarossa.³² Paralleling the theme of Florence's commercial character, it should be added that this example is quite consistent with the view that the arbitrariness of monarchic power, with its concomitant detachment from the community, posed a threat to the city's institutions and inhabitants. It is in this vein that the senators decide that the new city's name should commemorate the fact that general Florinus, “qui habuit nomen floris,” established its first settlement.

The *Chronica* then lists a series of reasons for the naming of Florence which might appear somewhat awkward to modern readers. In their quest to find a suitable name, the senators take a number of factors into account, including the propitious abundance of flowers in the nearby fields and the fact that the place “floruit in armis.” Furthermore, to commemorate Fiesole's defeat the

³⁰ Chellini *Chronica* 147-149. The sources include: 1. Thomas Tuscus' *Gesta imperatorum et pontificum*; 2. Anonymous vernacularization of Martin Polono's *Chronicon*; 3. Anonymous chronicle spuriously attributed to Francesco Petrarca; 4. Anonymous chronicle spuriously attributed to Brunetto Latini; 5. Paolino Pieri's vernacular chronicle; 6. The so-called “Napoletana-Gaddiana” chronicle; 7. Dino Compagni's vernacular *Cronica*; 8. Anonymous *Cronichetta Magliabecchiana*; 9. Tolomeo da Lucca's *Annales*. Chellini also provides an in-depth philological and bibliographical discussion on each.

³¹ Chellini *Chronica* 149.

³² Chellini *Chronica* 80-81. On the basis of a comparison of several historiographic sources, Chellini convincingly argues that this episode may allude to the events regarding the foundation of Alessandria, a thriving medieval commune located roughly where Piemonte is today, north-west of the Po Valley. Its first settlement started in 1168 under the protection of Pope Alexander III, hence its name. However, because its territory was subject to the imperial fiscal rights and the settlement was established by the pope without the emperor's permission, during his Italian campaign, in 1183 Emperor Barbarossa changed its former name to the ephemeral “Cesaria” in order to legitimize it and to erase the reference to the pope who had died two years before.

name of the new city came to include the Latin word “ensis,” that is, ‘sword.’ The two final reasons adduced are the already cited fact that Florinus died there, and, last but not least, that the ‘flower’ of Rome’s citizenry settled down in that place. Historians claim today that Florence was founded as a Roman encampment during the first century B.C., roughly confirming the chronicle’s chronology, and demonstrating, in contrast, that its name is probably derived from the *Floralia* feasts that used to be celebrated between April and May. Beyond the ideological implications of this aggregation of etymologies, a careful reading of this account reveals a certain degree of overlapping with historical events at its core.

Insofar as it reinforces an interpretation of Dante’s use of this text on an ideological rather than historical basis, what seems to modern eyes a somewhat hidden overlapping of history and mythopoesis helped redeem Dante’s perception of the *Chronica*’s credibility. In fact, in typical medieval fashion, Dante did not distinguish evidence-based history from its mythologically based counterpart. Thus what really resonates with Dante in this regard is the *Chronica*’s display of alignment between the city’s bellicose and commercial features from its foundation, owing to its Roman origins. In fact, the insertion of Florence’s foundation into the genealogical theme of Rome reveals an attempt to ennoble the business-oriented city.

These themes highlight the moral decadence resulting from the disruption of political and moral order caused by the primacy of economic and mercantile goals, an issue of great interest to Dante. Moreover, the account of the Senate’s refusal to set up the city as a marketplace, modeling it instead on Rome, must have appealed greatly to Dante, because it contrasts the ideal *civitas*, a long-standing unmixed community having a strong set of moral values, with a new-fangled, mixed community of people united in their shared mercantile orientation. On this basis, Chapter Two’s discussion of Dante’s allusions to the *Chronica* takes into account not only the *Chronica*’s communal and anti-imperial ideology, but also the complexities resulting from the ill-fated union of an idealized civic model on the one hand, and the mixture of the Florentines and the Faesulans on the other.

The *Chronica* further develops the theme of the enmity between Florence and Fiesole by recounting that in the centuries following Florence’s foundation, tensions between Florence and the rebuilt Fiesole were doomed to continue. Precisely five hundred years (“[e]lapsed postea quingentis annis”) later, “quidam rex nomine Badam, qui Totila Flagellum Dei fuit vocatum”, in his hatred for Rome, decided to destroy Florence and rebuild the stronghold of Fiesole with an anti-Roman purpose. It is true that Fiesole was a Gothic stronghold until 539, that Florence was besieged by the Ostrogothic king Totila around 542, albeit unsuccessfully, and only later on (after 547) probably sacked and partially destroyed, during the Gothic wars (534-554).³³ However, here the chronicle obviously confuses Totila with the other (in)famous king of the Huns, Attila, attributing the famous epithet “Flagellum Dei,” already attached to Attila in other medieval sources, to Totila – a mistake in historical accuracy that was to impact the *Commedia* too, as I will discuss in Chapter Two.³⁴

The *Chronica*’s account of Totila’s endeavor against Florence merits a more detailed discussion, precisely because it reflects a pattern present in the text and because this episode is taken up in turn by Dante. Particularly noteworthy is the justification of Totila’s siege of Florence in the context of his Italian campaign against the Romans; once again, it should be noted that the genealogical connection between Florence and Rome is explicitly concerned here. Unable to take over the city, the Ostrogothic king decides to make lavish gifts deceitfully (“donando cum dolositate”) to the city’s ruling patricians, who are effortlessly seduced by the king and invite him to enter the city. In so doing, the *Chronica* alludes to the communal disaster to which a ruling

³³ For an articulated account on Italy in that age, see: Chris Wickham’s *Early Medieval Italy* 9-27. The so-called Gothic wars were triggered by the killing of the Romanized Goth Amalasantha, mother of king Athalaric. Amalasantha acted as Athalaric’s regent insofar as he was a child, moving the Byzantine emperor Justinian to declare war on the Goths and to send his troops to Italy under the general Belisarius (24). See also: Chellini’s *Chronica* 85-86.

³⁴ The anonymous chronicle repeats the same mistake in chapter 10, ll. 32-33. It should be remembered, as I have already mentioned, that the *De vulgari eloquentia*, by contrast, cites Totila’s destruction of Florence (II, vi 5).

oligarchy may lead a city when, through the seduction of gifts that trigger its greed and self-complacent vanity, the political context of a supposed traditional alliance with the mother city, Rome, is unabashedly thrown over.

Thus, the king waits for a while outside, dissimulating his real aims to reinforce the inhabitants' trust in him; when finally he enters, he openly brings his troops inside and installs himself in the *Capitolium*, seemingly in peace but in reality to plot the city's destruction by deceit from within. In fact, Totila summons the magnates one by one and beheads them all, tossing their bodies in the canal bringing water from the Arno that is located next to the *Capitolium*, and his misdeed become apparent when "aqua dicti fluminis cepit rubescere propter sanguinem interfectorum." At this point, the king proceeds openly to massacre all the Florentines and burn the city to the ground, leaving only a few buildings standing. Then, he moves to the place where Fiesole was located, sets up his flag, rebuilds that stronghold, and allows the Florentine survivors to settle there under his control. Having done this, Totila continues his war in the Italian peninsula, destroying as many cities and strongholds as possible, "Tuscie et Lombardie et Romandiole et Marchie," before dying obscurely "in Maritima."³⁵

The rapid disappearance of the Goths from the Florentine narratives after Totila's death can be accounted for in two ways. First and most basically, he is the last Gothic king recorded in the medieval historiographic tradition. Second is the Gothic legal and social custom, beginning with their first king, Theodoric, who settled in Italy in 489, down to Totila (reigned 541-552), of rigorously separating themselves from the Romans. Indeed, Goths and Romans were separated in terms of both family lines and political affairs, to the point that Totila himself "is only known to have had one Roman official, his *quaestor* Spinus, an obscure figure from Spoleto."³⁶ Thus, such a separation is implicitly recognized within the *Chronica* itself.

Once again, what might strike modern eyes as an overlapping of history and mythology must be read according to the ideological and rhetorical terms in which Dante assimilated it. In fact, Dante could have been struck on the authoritative basis of Vergil's major poem by the *Chronica*'s description of Totila as a sort of Ulysses *post-litteram*, or better still, a *figura Ulypsis*, who replicates the pattern of deceit and destruction, transposing the destruction of Troy onto that of Florence. Because the *Chronica* does not explicitly mention him in its summary of Troy's destruction, in a sense Ulysses, though absent, stands in as an implicit, pre-figuration of Totila. Dante's familiarity with the Vergilian text allows him to fill this gap by referring to Aeneas' account of the destruction of Troy in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*.

In this light, Ulysses is a prominent figure among the Greeks, standing out for his treacherous and crafty deceit: "scelerumque inventor Ulixem" (*Aen.* II, 164); "dirus Ulixes" (II, 261). On this basis, Totila clearly becomes the *figura* of a political and military leader who skilfully employs deceit to gain his enemies' trust, taking advantage of the greed and vanity of its most politically illustrious citizens, as a strategy enabling him to introduce his troops into the city and destroy it from within through a 'surprise' attack. Even some details, such as the fact that Florence is destroyed by fire ("Et armatus ipse rex et sui milites ... mictendo ignem in ipsa civitate, destruxerunt eam") clearly allow educated Florentine readers – Dante pre-eminently among them –

³⁵ Chellini *Chronica* 91: these place names coincide with the official names used by the Lega Lombarda, which in 1226 renamed itself "societas Lombardie, Marchie ac Romaniolae". The Lega Lombarda was a military *societas* of Northern and Italian communes instituted against the emperor Frederick I Barbarossa in his Italian enterprises. Consequently, Chellini connects the political meaning of the tale of Totila with that of Caesar, who wished to name the newly founded city after himself. In so doing, Chellini notes that the *Chronica* alludes once again to those monarchs as *figurae* of Barbarossa, referring to the diplomatic tricks played by the emperor in his siege of Milan in 1162, compared with the lavish and deceitful gifts of Totila to the magnates. Even though Chellini is probably right in pointing out these similarities, the detail of such an easy corruption of the magnates could have struck the imagination of a medieval Florentine such as Dante, proud of an ideal republican order guaranteed by a balance between republican institutions and imperial control.

³⁶ Wickham *Early Medieval Italy* 24.

to make connections with Vergil's *Aeneid*, which dwells on that aspect in Aeneas' account of the destruction of Troy (II, 310-12; 329-30; 336; 352-53; 374-75; 431; etc.).

One might wonder how such an account could have influenced Dante's poetic rendering of the character of Ulysses, to whom the *Chronica* alludes as a *distructor civitatis*. An articulated answer to this question presents a complex series of connections, discussed in Chapter Three, taking into account a wide range of sources, although my focus remains on civic chronicles and other public displays of the commune's self-representation. The most famous example in this regard is found in the first three lines of *Inferno* XXVI ("Godi, Fiorenza, poi che se' sí grande/ che per mare e per terra batti l'ali,/ e per lo 'nferno tuo nome si spande!") which clearly allude to the first few verses of an inscription dating back to the government of the *Primo Popolo* and which can still be read today on the wall of the Palazzo del Bargello in Florence.

After Totila's obscure death, the Romans quickly decide to rebuild Florence once again, restoring its anti-Faesulan function. Once they receive the appropriate astrological messages, they plan a new set of walls "modico circuitu", thus keeping the perimeter small, with gates at the four cardinal points: "Sancti Petri", "Sancti Pancratii," "Sancta Maria," and the gate "iuxta episcopatum Florentinum", today known as 'del Vescovado.' Then, both the topographic locations in which Florence's churches are built, and their names are said to reflect those of the churches in Rome, that is, the churches of San Pietro, San Paolo, San Lorenzo, Santo Stefano and San Giovanni. It should be noted, however, that Charles T. Davis has demonstrated that such analogies are generic and coincide only partially with reality, due to the chroniclers' lack of knowledge about Rome's topography.³⁷ Once again, it should be emphasized that, whether a matter of historical fact, narrative consistency, or even actual topography, in this example of civic historiography the commune's glorification of its ideology is more important than historical accounts provided by established *auctoritates*.

Skipping forward five years, the chronicle then recounts the historical Florentine conquest of Fiesole in 1125, during a period of imperial vacancy.³⁸ To avoid the massacre of Fiesole's inhabitants by the Florentines, both cities' bishops agree "per compromissum" to the destruction of Fiesole and the forcible removal of its citizens to Florence, maintaining Fiesole as a mere administrative seat of its own bishop – as, in effect, it has remained through the centuries up to the present day. This passage stands out with respect to the *Chronica*'s overall ambivalence regarding the relationship of the Christian establishment and the commune in the sense that the clerical elite is represented as preserving the citizens' well-being, which in turn might allude to the Florentine ecclesiastic establishment's attempts to serve as political mediator, both in the concreteness of historical events and in the construction of shared civic memories.

The *Chronica* ends with a confirmation of its interest in the origins of the communal *civitas*, offering Florentine-centered accounts of the divergent origins and subsequent para-etymologies of names of other Tuscan cities, including most notably Pisa and Lucca. In so doing, the Florentine commune's exclusive rights to claim a noble Roman origin are predictably highlighted. These para-etymologies can be divided into two categories which reflect two themes running through the *Chronica*, that is, the history of Florence as inserted into the larger history of the Roman Empire, and the rise of Christianity in Tuscany.

The supposed origins of the name Pisa belongs to the first of these two categories: because the flow of tax revenue collected from Rome's African and barbarian subjects had to pass by sea through Pisa, the city acquired its name from the necessity to weigh tributes twice on two different

³⁷ Charles T. Davis "Topographical and Historical Propaganda in Early Florentine Chronicles and in Villani," 37-38. Chellini substantially agrees with Davis, although in emphasizing a few archaeological similarities in the religious edifices in both cities, he is at odds with Davis, suggesting that the chronicler may have had direct knowledge of Rome's topography (96-97).

³⁸ Chellini *Chronica* 97.

scales, two “*pisae*” – hence the word-play with the eponymous Latin version of the city’s name.³⁹ The narrative of the city of Lucca is more closely connected with Christianity and its role in establishing the Church in Tuscany. Its presence extemporaneously harks back to the insertion of Christian history at the beginning of the second part of the text: Lucca’s name alludes to the *lux* of the Christian faith, insofar as it was the first Tuscan city to convert to Christianity and thus the first Tuscan bishop was established there. The discussion of the bishop resonates with the *Chronica*’s unequivocal attitude towards the Church. With these fictitious etymologies alluding to different sets of prevailing virtues or vices, the *Chronica* ends.

Applying the concept of collective memory to the medieval Florentine context

Some clarifications of my theoretical framework must be provided before proceeding in the next chapter to the close reading of the Dantean poetic negotiations with such a civic narrative tradition. The *Chronica*’s role as a foundational text for the medieval Florentine identity implies not only its deep and prolonged influence, but also the formation of a communal collective memory in reciprocal dialogue with the individual instances in which such memory emerges and by which it is in turn reshaped, as happened in the case of Dante’s poetry. Despite its modernity, the notion of ‘collective memory’ refers to a complex cultural phenomenon that may be found in every organized human society, implying substantial similarities in the way in which socio-cultural structures work even in different spatial-temporal coordinates. As such, it enriches our understanding of the medieval Italian communal context, and specifically Florence and its narrative sources.

As is well known, the notion of ‘collective memory’ was formulated in the first decades of the twentieth century by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who coined the term *mémoire collective* and who first researched methodically the forms of collective references to the past. In so doing, Halbwachs deserves credit for having opened up the modern field of memory studies.⁴⁰ During the Middle Ages, the closest comparable notion to the *mémoire collective* was probably that of *loci memoriae*, a substantial part of the so-called *ars memoriae* which dealt with the modalities of remembering the past and was derived from the widely known Latin treatises on rhetoric, such as Cicero’s *De Oratore*, pseudo-Cicero’s *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*.⁴¹

Loci memoriae were intended as mere mnemotechnical tools in the orator’s training to build an ‘artificial memory,’ pairing concepts with textual and visual ‘backgrounds’ (*loci*), so that they could be recalled easily and used appropriately during an *oratio*. Le Goff points out the close connections between the classic rhetorical tradition and Dante’s age,⁴² emphasizing that, in the context of the thirteenth-century *ars dictaminis* (which reprised and actualized the former rhetorical tradition), Dante was likely familiar with the *Rhetorica novissima* (1235) by Boncompagno da

³⁹ Chellini *Chronica* 100: further meaning is suggested citing Ugucione da Pisa, who “suggerisce una connessione del poleonimo *Pisae* col verbo *pensare*. L’invenzione delle due pese sembra dunque essersi formata in seguito alla lettura delle *Derivationes*, non sappiamo se a Pisa o grazie all’Anonimo. Certo essa fu accolta nella cronachistica pisana del quattordicesimo secolo”.

⁴⁰ See Halbwachs’ *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), *On Collective Memory* (1926), and *La mémoire collective* (1950). Moreover, I have consulted the references to Halbwachs in the following manuals, which help readers orient themselves within the growing field of memory studies: Astrid Erll *Memory in Culture* 13-18; Barbara A. Misztal *Theories of Social Remembering* 50-56.

⁴¹ On the relationship between medieval rhetoric and modern memory studies see: Pim den Boer’s “*Loci memoriae*-*Lieux de mémoire*” 19-25. Moreover, on the conception of memory during the Middle Ages see also: Yates *The Art of Memory*; Carruthers *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*; and Bolzoni “Dante o della memoria appassionata.”

⁴² Le Goff *History and Memory* 68-80. The chapter “Memory in the Middle Ages-Western Europe” is relevant to my discussion here, because it unfolds the ways in which memory was perceived and used during the Middle Ages, even though with a focus on the role of Christianity.

Signa, an influential professor at the University of Bologna.⁴³ Le Goff points out that medieval rhetoric:

integrates into the science of memory the essential systems of the Christian morality of the Middle Ages, the virtues and vices which he makes into *signacula* ... and perhaps especially, beyond artificial memory, but as “a fundamentally memory exercise,” the remembrance of Heaven and Hell This is an important innovation that, after the *Divine Comedy*, will inspire countless representations of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, which should usually be regarded as “memory places” whose various levels or chambers recall vices and virtues.⁴⁴

While significant, the role of Boncompagno in shaping Dante’s mastery of rhetoric should not be overestimated, for two reasons. First, Boncompagno himself is indebted to a much wider tradition dating back at least to Augustine. Second, his role in forging Dante’s rhetorical skills was likely overshadowed by that of Brunetto Latini, as I discuss in Chapter Two. In fact, Boncompagno’s Christianized *loci* – a rhetorical technique that a person as erudite as Dante certainly knew well – are related to signs drawn exclusively from the Bible.

Nonetheless, when Dante in the *Commedia* recalls some *loci* which belong to his civic tradition and typically do not overlap with signs drawn from the Bible, it is paramount to keep in mind the value of exemplarity of the model of collective memory according to which such *loci* were remembered.⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, the most important scholar who dealt with collective memory after Halbwachs, the French cultural historian Pierre Nora, recovered both the medieval terminology and its original use, translating it as a sort of macro-mnemotechnic tool for social contexts, and in so doing offered a model for discussing cultural memory within a narrative that could fit well within the medieval context. For the moment, a more complete discussion of Halbwachs’ theories will help us to fit that specific medieval notion within the broader panorama of civic memories in thirteenth-century Italy; Nora’s theory will be dealt with more directly later.

Halbwachs departs from the technical and didactical dimension of memory pertaining to classic and medieval rhetoric. In the wake of Durkheim’s argument that every society has a sense of continuity with its past, he regards memories as intrinsically dependent on social structures. Indeed, he asserts that the most personal memories must be regarded as a product of collective influences. On the one hand, according to Halbwachs, individuals acquire knowledge only through interaction with fellow humans, and in so doing recollect memories through a system of ‘social frameworks’ (*càdres sociaux*) which usually evolve over time. As a consequence, according to Halbwachs, changes of social frameworks modify individual memories as well. On the other hand, collective and individual memories are mutually interdependent: “One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories” (Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* 40).

To summarize Halbwach’s theory, there is no way out of the continuous circle of society and individuals, from the point of view of creating and disseminating memories. Of course, Halbwachs’ model is helpful in analyzing the role of collective memory, even in individual instances emerging from a literary text, and vice versa. However, ever since Halbwachs first published his books in the 1920s, French academicians, Charles Blondel and Marc Bloch most

⁴³ Tateo “Boncompagno da Signa” acknowledges the high probability of a direct influence at least of selected Boncompagno’s writings on rhetoric on Dante, even though he clearly warns that the mediation of Brunetto Latini, which had dealt with Boncompagno’s teachings before Dante, represented “una svolta degli studi retorici in senso politico-civile e antiaccademico, nonché una maggiore adesione alla tradizione dei classici” (674).

⁴⁴ Le Goff *History and Memory* 77.

⁴⁵ Sticking to the medieval context, Bolzoni “Dante o della memoria appassionata” explores the above mentioned conception and use of memory and lays the foundation for further research to be conducted on Dante’s appropriation of memory, discussing some textual instances drawn from the *Commedia*.

prominently among them, have criticized the rigidity of his theoretical position regarding identity as socially constructed.

These criticisms distinctly resonate with my effort to develop close textual readings taking this formulation of ‘collective memory’ as a foundational theoretical reference. Indeed, the social memories sometimes present in literary texts could be reconstructed through a comparative approach with other written sources, such as, in this case, Dante’s *Commedia* with the *Chronica*. However, rigidly following Halbwachs’ model in implementing such a reading would incur the risk of overlapping with the data emerging from a plain intertextual analysis aimed at reconstructing sources. As a consequence, this approach further defers discussions regarding the complexity of the author’s interiority and individuality in relation to the surrounding milieu.

Thus it is crucial to contextualize Dante’s identity as a Florentine citizen socially and politically through the historical narratives of his city which produced a collective memory. On the other hand, a textual reading based on the quest for the shared memories of a community framed in a particular time and place (in this case, medieval Florence) within a poetic oeuvre such as Dante’s confirms the poet’s debt to the memories that shaped both his identity and his art. The monolithic assumption that everything individual derives from and belongs to the social context ultimately fails to enhance our understanding of the meanings behind the author’s choices to incorporate such memories into his poetry.

Keeping Halbwachs’ model in the background in order to deal with it with the flexibility it requires, I aim to discuss the complex ways in which the author responds to these memories when incorporating them poetically. Thus, my proposed hermeneutical approach to situating Dante’s negotiation within the Florentine background of collective memory implies, in predictably non-linear ways, a formally, politically and even emotionally strong personal position on the poet’s part. This approach complicates the investigation of the “polysemous” layers of meaning famously presented as a major reference point for interpreting the *Commedia* as a self-commentary in the *Epistle to Cangrande*. At the same time, it enriches Mazzotta’s unfolding of the rhetorical strategies which serve as hermeneutical building blocks for recognizing the staggering richness of clashing meanings hidden within the poetic word.

Thus, beyond the multilayered nature of my approach, the pilgrim’s ambivalent, sometimes irreconcilable character functions as the ultimate repository of meanings when memory is concerned, as revealed, for instance, in his *odi et amo* feelings towards his native city; his oscillation between emotional closeness and ironic criticism of the narrative myths of foundation which shaped its collective memories; recantatory strategies used both to overcome the poem’s internal contradictions in presenting the civic materials and to strengthen his authorial control. The hidden and clashing meanings which undermine every attempt to produce linear and unproblematic readings are reflected in at least two other theoretical issues which are directly dependent on Halbwachs’ theories and essential to the textual reading I will develop in the following chapters.

First, the reader of Halbwachs sometimes has the impression that collective memory is conceived as a homogeneous entity, that the social agents are somehow of equal relevance because of their innate ability to remember according to the ‘social framework’ (*càdres sociaux*) of the interaction and because, such a collective memory is usually manifested through the individual. In this regard, social complexities and dynamism – which of course were, often quite dramatically, at stake in the context of the Italian medieval communes – may be invoked first and foremost in order to disrupt the sense of linearity of memory’s transmission as Halbwachs describes it. In fact, in the background of the *Chronica* we can glimpse the social complexities and dynamism that are highly discernible in Dante’s poetic treatment of his native city’s history. For this reason, modern historians understand it as an official civic text produced by an anonymous compiler, likely a member of the clergy aligned with the newly established Florentine commune, in order to justify its political pretensions, especially against attempts at imperial control. Chellini argues that the author

was probably an ecclesiastic of Florence's Episcopal school, if not the bishop himself.⁴⁶ Thus the anonymous author exerted his political role in and influence over the communal government. Furthermore, the fact that the chronicle was originally written in Latin, the official language of the Church, law and culture, is consistent with the newly powerful social class' aim of shaping a new authoritative tradition rooted in its values.

The second issue stemming from Halbwachs' approach runs through the almost century-long debate on collective memory studies and promises to be helpful in reading Dante; that is, the debate concerning the definitions of 'history' and 'memory'. To what extent can a text like the *Chronica* be defined both as 'history' (keeping in mind the medieval sense of history which emphasized the exemplarity of facts over their veracity) and as propagator of shared 'memory' which shaped individual identities in its social context? And, even more importantly, by extension: how useful would it be to pursue this distinction [between history and memory?] in Dante's dealing with those narratives, to better understand his poetic responses to a morally and politically charged collective memory that manifested itself through the transmission of a handful of mythical and historical facts?

To address these questions with reference to Halbwachs, who first made this distinction in the context of collective memory, 'history' is by definition written and refers to past events, characterized by ruptures and contradictions coordinated as neutrally as possible in their posthumous reconstruction, and it starts from the intellectual endeavor of an individual. By contrast, 'lived memory' – that is, collective memory, by Halbwachs' definition 'oral' – fades away. In Halbwachs' opinion the central function of 'memory' is the formation of individual identity in the *present*, and not, as in the case of 'history,' a coordinated, disinterested and faithful reconstruction of the *past*. As a consequence 'memory' is a strongly evaluative and hierarchical tool, to the extent that it corresponds to the self-constructed images and interests of the community to which the individuals belong.

This line of reasoning implies that the diachronic overlapping of such 'memories' in a well-defined social context inevitably produces a distortion of the historical truth. Approaching this distinction with due flexibility, we can set it within the medieval context where it is all but impossible to reconstruct the oral collective memory without written texts. In this sense, Halbwachs' theory seems to shed light on why, to the modern reader, a text such as the *Chronica*, seen as an individual compilation within a collective memory that oscillates from the pole of literary erudition to the opposite pole of oral civic traditions, seems closer to fiction than to a historical account.

Unfortunately, when applied to a historicized close reading of a text, Halbwachs' model seems plagued by a reductionism that is in itself problematic. First of all, his rigid distinction between 'history' and 'memory' sounds decidedly anachronistic when applied to a medieval chronicle such as the *Chronica*. In fact, this distinction does not take into account that such a narrative is embedded within the model of ecclesiastic history, which recounts past events from a perspective of universal history according to a didactic and moralistic point of view centered on the conviction that such a history will be fulfilled in a salvific dimension, insofar as Christian revelation is aimed at the progressive improvement of the human condition.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ After summarizing the discussions about the possible authors of the *Chronica* (128-135), Chellini convincingly points out that the text has a didactic character, and attributes its compilation to the ecclesiastic Florentine environment: "Poiché l'anonimo autore della *Chronica* mostra uno spiccato interesse per le questioni religiose ed ecclesiastiche e una speciale attenzione alla storia istituzionale e territoriale delle diocesi toscane, mi sembra di avanzare l'ipotesi che il testo sia stato destinato alla scuola episcopale di San Giovanni ..." (129). Chellini then advances the hypothesis that the actual author was Giovanni from Velletri, bishop of Florence from 1205 to 1230, or someone close to him; but this theory requires further substantiation.

⁴⁷ On medieval ecclesiastic history, see: Richard W. Southern's *La tradizione della storiografia medievale*, especially chs. II ("Ugo di San Vittore e l'idea dello sviluppo storico") and III ("Storiografia e profezia"). Useful introductions to the topic include Marino Zabbia "La tradizione dell'esperienza storica" 9-33, and Francesco Natale and Enrico Pispisa *Introduzione allo studio della storia medievale* 24-32.

Moreover, Halbwachs' distinction between 'written history' and 'oral memory' is problematic as a theoretical model to understand collective memory in a text like the *Chronica*, not least because the *Chronica*'s formal structure as ecclesiastical history contains a narrative in which literary sources, local legend and actual historical facts are inextricably entangled with the political purposes of its anonymous, ecclesiastical compiler, within the social-political context of his communal environment. The rigidity of Halbwachs' distinction between 'history' and 'memory' has been directly or indirectly challenged by the majority of scholars who have dealt with collective memory after him.

To cite just one example, the very influential French cultural historian Pierre Nora differs sharply from his predecessor, even though he keeps collective memory separate from history. Indeed, while Halbwachs asserts the simultaneous existence of history and collective memory in society, Nora emphasizes a widespread tendency towards loss of memory (which he calls *milieux de mémoire*, "real environments of memory"). As a result, recovery from that loss requires that societies craft what he calls *lieux de mémoire*, "sites of memory." The latter can include, as Astrid Erll summarizes, "geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art, as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical or scientific text, and symbolic actions" which function as "a sort of artificial placeholders for the no longer existent, natural collective memory."⁴⁸ As already suggested, it should be specified that Nora picks up on the rhetorical notion of *loci memoriae*, removing any medieval Christian significance from the term, yet not completely discarding a certain exemplary and moralistic undertone. He translated *loci memoriae* literally into French, applying *lieux de mémoire* to the modern cultural context in order to point out their quasi-mnemotechnic role in assessing the foundational social role of selected "sites of memory," and as such their usefulness in shaping individual identity.

Nora's main interest was to underscore the *lieux* of French republican memory, and he pessimistically described the social loss of identity, a condition in which individual memories are fragmented and no longer cohesive, as a central feature of such a memory. Thus in the three-volume *Les lieux de mémoire* he conceived and edited he offers an account of why the nineteenth-century French Third Republic first created the modern *lieux* to preserve a progressively fading memory. Although Nora's position on French history has been criticized as strongly judgmental, and although he did not explicitly develop a theoretical framework on collective memory capable of uncovering its features in different spatial-temporal contexts, his notion of *lieux de mémoire* at least allows us to explain more precisely than Halbwachs how collective memory finds fulfilment in its social concreteness in the course of history.

Despite Nora's faithfulness to Halbwachs' distinction between 'history' and 'memory', he appears to narrow it. In fact, he points out that, in order to become a *lieu de mémoire*, a cultural object must have certain attributes, such as: a material dimension (not only a text, an image, a work of art etc. in their objective concreteness, but also a past event witnessed and registered); a functional dimension (the object must have a function within the society in which it was produced); and an intentional symbolic dimension (the object acquires a socially charged connection to the past that transcends its mere existence).⁴⁹ In this regard, the *Chronica* can be seen as a free-standing cultural object in Nora's scheme, but the absence of a diachronic dimension in Nora's theoretical framework precludes any satisfactory account of how collective memory unfolds and is transmitted and propagated.

However, if Nora's scheme is integrated with the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's thought on the diachronic transmission of cultural memory, the reading of the *Chronica* from a Dantean perspective acquires fuller resonance. Moreover, this does not limit us to reading individual instances of collective memory within the reductionist framework of the individual/society cycle as

⁴⁸ Erll *Memory* 23. Pierre Nora presented his theory in the essay "Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire", in which he lays the foundations for his theory on the role of sites of memory in modern France.

⁴⁹ Nora "Between memory" 19.

Halbwachs does. Ricoeur effectively bridges Halbwachs and Nora's distinction between 'memory' and 'history,' because his ultimate focus is not the interplay between historical facts and the role of memory in their re-elaboration, but rather, as I will clarify shortly, on the narrative text's flexible and ductile features in subsuming the complexities inherent in the process of cultural transmission.

Ricoeur describes collective memory as a 'circle of mimesis', in a way which, coincidentally, partially overlaps with Auerbach's famous definition.⁵⁰ Building on the original Aristotelian concept of mimesis, Ricoeur is interested in locating the status[?] of a literary text within a broader reflection on the ways in which memories are manifested and organized in time; in fact, in his words, chronological time "becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative".⁵¹ To that purpose, Ricoeur distinguishes three levels in which mimesis is represented: the first postulates that a literary text is prefigured in the cultural memory that precedes it; the second, that the newly created narrative memory recounted in a text acquires a literary configuration; the third, that these new narratives are likely to enjoy subsequent "refiguration in the framework of different mnemonic communities,"⁵² through the act of reading and subsequent rewritings, creating a flow of new, reshaped collective memories.

The basic question underlying the significance of Ricoeur's thought on these matters may be formulated as follows: why does literature become so important in representing cultural memory, effectively creating history through its narratives, if compared with Halbwachs' society/written history loop in relation to his individuals/oral memories loop, and Nora's *lieux de mémoire* artificially created by the social controlling power to overcome the unavoidable loss of memory and identity of the individuals? In Ricoeur's words,

[p]lot, says Aristotle, is the *mimesis* of an action ... whereas metaphorical redescrptions reign in the field of sensory, emotional, aesthetic, and axiological values, which make the world an habitable world, the mimetic function of plots takes place by preference in the field of action and of its temporal values ... I see in the plots we invent the privileged means by which we reconfigure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal existence.⁵³

In other words, according to Ricoeur, literature's narrative plots, as configured in a threefold mimetic process, represent the only possibility of closing the gap, in terms of human experience, between the construction of collective and of individual memories. It has the protean ability, while it unfolds in a diachronic process, to pull together all the basic dimensions that make this connection/union possible. As Astrid Erll summarizes,

[L]iterature can refer to the material dimension of memory culture (for example, historiography, memorials ... and discourses about the past); to its social dimension (for example, commemorative rituals, different mnemonic communities and institutions; to its mental dimension (for example, values and norms, stereotypes and other powerful schemata

⁵⁰ Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 152-55. Ricoeur's common ground with the famous definition provided by the German scholar evinces a shared interest in reading literature according to the role of the representation of reality through literary fiction, an endeavor within which Auerbach gives Dante's *Commedia* a central role in the Western canon. Considering that Auerbach does not deal directly with the inclusion of collective memory in literature, the difference between the two scholars is also methodological: the philologist Auerbach is directly interested in extrapolating the way in which the perception of reality is modified through close textual readings of literary masterpieces; the philosopher Ricoeur aims to lay out an encompassing theoretical structure to fit narratives' representations within the flow of time.

⁵¹ Ricoeur *Time* I 3.

⁵² Erll *Memory* 153.

⁵³ Ricoeur *Time* I XI. A remarkable coincidence from the perspective of my project emerges in these words: the assertion that "metaphorical redescrptions reign in the field of sensory, emotional, aesthetic, and axiological values, which make the world an habitable world" coincides with Mazzotta's approach to Dante's text. Although Ricoeur contrasts this dimension with the field of time through narratives, and my approach more closely follows Ricoeur, I integrate this approach with Mazzotta's metaphorical reading, which I hold in high esteem.

for representing the past). It appropriates elements from these dimensions through intertextual, intermedial, and interdiscursive references.⁵⁴

Indeed, Ricoeur's focus on the adaptability of literature, based on its preference for time-ordered narratives, to link social and individual memories encompassing a wide range of dimensions has been highly influential in the field of memory studies, and it has been applied to readings of a wide range of cultural objects as well. For instance, in his study of the transformation of memory from Soviet to post-Soviet Russia, James Wertsch develops his anthropological approach to collective memory by focusing on how the narrative dimension of cultural objects mediates their functioning. He maintains that collective memory is best understood as being distributed between active agents and the textual resources they employ.⁵⁵ Ricoeur's theory of collective memory thus sets literary narratives at its center, and is confirmed by its application in several studies, including Wertsch's, which successfully reveal the complex process of an original rewriting of shared memory sources.

For the purposes of my investigations, Ricoeur's focus on the diachronic flow matches well with the hermeneutical tools deployed in Ascoli's discussion of literary recantation; in fact, Ascoli cites Ricoeur in his discussion of Dante's transcendence of historical time (315-16). In these pages, which examine the textual strategies deployed by Dante to affirm the novelty of his awareness as an author, Ascoli provides a useful example of how the palinodic structure, applied in this case to Dante the pilgrim's self-presentation, overlaps with and is enriched by Ricoeur's dynamic conception of time. As such, Ricoeur's theoretical framework can also be critical in revealing the underlying meanings of the whole process involving Dante's role in dealing with the *Chronica*'s context of production (according to the first level of Ricoeur's 'mimesis') and his original reshaping of them (the second level), an effort which was strongly influential in allowing its successful re-use (the third level) – at least, from Giovanni Villani's *Nuova Cronica* onwards, as I have already pointed out, for at least two centuries ahead.

Insofar as we recognize the *Cronica* as a cultural object worthy of remembrance in the wider context in which its contents were developed and subsequently reshaped, Ricoeur's diachronic interpretive scheme can be usefully complemented by Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*: Dante's heavy reliance on the *Chronica* for the images and values of ancient Florentine history presented in the *Commedia* infuses the poem with specific "sites" of collective memory prominent in the earlier civic narrative. The matter is further complicated by the fact that, alongside the character of "site of memory" attached to the text in its material diffusion, certain other topical "sites of memory" are discernible in its narrative, related to certain foundational events in Florentine history, in close connection to a few characters which recur in Dante's oeuvre as well as other chronicles during and after Dante's time.

A list of such textually internal "sites," which will be specified more precisely and discussed extensively in the next chapter, should at least include:

- 1) Florence's mythical and genealogical foundation by Rome, which in turn originated from Troy, which in turn originated from Fiesole;
- 2) the ancestral and recurrent enmity between Fiesole and Florence, culminating in Fiesole's historical destruction by Florence in 1125.

⁵⁴ Erll *Memory* 153.

⁵⁵ Wertsch *Voices of Collective Remembering*. The same author has recently revisited the theme in the article "Text of Memory and Texts of History" in occasion of a special issue "on History and Memory in Foreign Language Study" of *L2 Journal*, in which he traces the evolution of the two terms as used in the social sciences, keeping them separated to a certain degree in the tradition of Halbwachs and Nora. This distinction, worth emphasizing, is one that collapses in Ricoeur's view, which as a consequence better fits the nature of the medieval texts I am dealing with. In the same journal's special issue, I have developed a model didactic unit that integrates medieval Florentine history and memory in the context of the L2 acquisition of Italian in the American academic context: "Bridging Language and History in an Advanced Italian classroom: Perspectives on Medieval Florentine Narratives within their Context."

Some secondary “sites,” contingent on the primary ones cited above, are at stake in Dante’s poem, namely:

- 1) the role of other Tuscan cities (Pistoia, Siena, Lucca, Pisa) as either allies or enemies of Florence as a rising power;
- 2) the role of a few historical figures (in particular, Caesar and Totila) in the context of Florence’s foundation and its enmity with Fiesole;
- 3) the topographic similarities that Rome allegedly infused into Florence when founding it and again when rebuilding it after its second destruction.

In recalling my previous remarks on the *Chronica*’s anti-imperial aura it should be emphasized that, against Nora’s implication that the role of such “sites” in replacing a fading memory (at least in nineteenth-century France) is somehow passive, the *Chronica*’s anonymous Florentine compiler played the more active role of “cultural agent” (to use Wertsch’s term) in forging new memories, even if in doing so he made use of oral memories that would otherwise have been forgotten, with enduring influences on communal narratives for centuries to come. The complexity of the diachronic process theorized by Ricoeur enhances our interpretive awareness of the literary narrative, because a focus on its centrality allows us to recognize that it links society and the individual, shared memories and their production by agents, literary sources and their use: in a word, history and memory within a unified whole.

Chapter Two

Dante, Brunetto and the Florentine chronicles

This chapter builds on Chapter One's discussion of Dante's reliance on the Florentine chronicle tradition, most centrally the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae*. Beginning with a survey of the passages in the *Commedia* where this tradition is invoked, the chapter goes on to discuss Brunetto Latini's role in reshaping Florentine historiography, with which Dante engaged both ideologically and rhetorically. References to the *Chronica* and a few other early chronicles in a handful of passages in the *Commedia* have been systematically enumerated and discussed by John Barnes and Riccardo Chellini in their recent works.⁵⁶ Aware that Dante never cites *any* medieval civic chronicle(r) as a direct source for his knowledge of Florentine history, these scholars make clear that a critical attempt at selecting such references should take into account the degree of their allusiveness, which oscillates between Barnes' and Chellini's hypothetical reconstructions and their synthesis of the acknowledgment of these allusions, beginning with the *Commedia's* earliest commentators.

The uncertainty involved in reading such materials as intertextual 'sources' fosters further critical complications by situating their rediscussion within a wider range of ideological and rhetorical implications embedded in Dante's works. Thus, from a methodological standpoint my inquiry is not aimed at determining the extent to which these texts function as 'sources.' Written narratives spawn collective memory, which in turn builds a personal civic identity. It is upon his awareness of being a 'citizen,' that is, involved in a civic community and its memories, that Dante constructs his own political identity and fits it into an eschatology which presupposes a divinely provided order directed toward humankind's happiness in this world and the salvation of souls in the afterlife.

Filtering Dante's allusions: the chronicles as interpretive tool

This chapter deals with a corpus of materials to shed light on the wider interpretive connections that can be drawn around Dante's complex web of allusions to early Florentine history in the *Commedia* and other works. This requires carefully sifting through the known references and evaluating them according to their contribution to an understanding of the ideological and rhetorical use Dante makes of them. In so doing, my interpretation will point out Dante's tendency to include in the most ideologically charged of those allusions more or less subtle, indirect, and ironic references to Brunetto Latini's literary, pedagogical and political activity in thirteenth-century Florence.

For the convenience of readers unfamiliar with their work, the following list synthesizes the Dantean references Barnes and Chellini identify as alluding in some way to the *Chronica* or other early Florentine chronicles:

- From *Inferno*:

- 1) IV 121-23 (discussed in: Chellini 154-155)
- 2) X, 86 (Chellini 182-183)
- 3) XII 133-34 (Barnes 99, Chellini 171-179)
- 4) XIII 143-52 (Barnes 100-101, 106, 112; Chellini 171-79, both with reference to: DVE II, 6, 4)

⁵⁶ John Barnes "Dante's Knowledge of Florentine History" *Dante and his Literary Precursors. Twelve Essays*, ed. John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie, Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2007 (93-116). Chellini *Chronica* 151-183.

- 5) XV 61-78 (Barnes 96, 98-100, 102-103; Chellini 163-67, both with reference to: CV I, III, 4; Ep. VI, 8 and VII, 35)
- 6) XXIV 140-51 (Chellini 155-160)
- 7) XXV 10-12 (Chellini 160-161)
- 8) XXVIII 107 (Barnes 111-112)
- 9) XXIX 121-123 (Chellini 181-182)

- From *Purgatorio*:

- 1) XI 112-114 (Barnes 108-109)
- 2) XIII 115-119 (Barnes 108-109)

- From *Paradiso*:

- 1) VI 52-54 (Barnes 96, Chellini 161-163)
- 2) XV 91-99 (Chellini, 179-181), 121-126 (Barnes 93, Chellini 151-154)
- 3) XVI 46-48 (Chellini 171-179), 49-66 (Barnes 103-104, 110), 71-72 (Chellini 170), 124-126 (Chellini 179-181), 136-144 (Barnes 107-108, 110-111), 145-147 (Barnes 112, Chellini 171-179).

Although there is substantial overlap in the passages from the *Commedia* discussed by Barnes and Chellini, each begins and develops his research from a different standpoint.

Barnes is primarily concerned with identifying “whether the surviving written sources account fully for Dante’s knowledge of Florentine history. And we quickly realize that they do not,”⁵⁷ adducing many instances of events cited or alluded to in the *Commedia* that we cannot retrieve in any extant chronicle written before Dante’s age.⁵⁸ Moreover, although Barnes concedes that the *Chronica* is the foundational source for his purpose and hence deals primarily with that text, he also seeks references in others, because he deals extensively with the issue of Buondelmonte’s murder and the dawn of Florentine political factionalism based on the strife of Guelfs and Ghibellines.⁵⁹

It should be remembered that this theme is absent in the *Chronica*, which instead implicitly attributes the civic factionalism to the intermingling between Florence, portrayed as ‘daughter of Rome’, and Fiesole, portrayed as anti-Roman city par excellence, and their enduring enmity. Instead, the theme of Guelf-Ghibelline factionalism is derived from two later chronicles, the *Gesta Florentinorum* as reconstructed by Schmeidler, and the later anonymous, untitled text known as the chronicle of pseudo-Brunetto.⁶⁰ Each of these texts relates events occurring in Florence after A.D. 1000, as mentioned in Chapter One. A case in point is the myth attributing the city’s division into Guelfs and Ghibellines to the murder of Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti, prominent in the *Commedia*. The most direct reference to this theme is the pilgrim’s encounter with Mosca de’ Lamberti, traditionally reputed to be the orchestrator of the murder:

E un ch’avea l’una e l’altra man mozza,
levando i moncherin per l’aura fosca,

⁵⁷ Barnes “Dante’s Knowledge” 113.

⁵⁸ Barnes “Dante’s Knowledge” 113-114. On the basis on those instances, Barnes deduces that “either the information reached [Dante] by word of mouth or he read it in sources that have been lost” (114), and in either case it is impossible to reconstruct them on the basis of our current knowledge. After listing Dante’s historical references that cannot be explained by the above mentioned chronicles, Barnes concludes that the only general feature we can infer is that “all of them are concerned in one way or another with population, family prestige and genealogy” (115).

⁵⁹ In particular, Barnes also deals with the following sources, in this order: Sanzanome’s *Gesta Florentinorum*, Brunetto Latini’s *Tresor*, the anonymous *Gesta Florentinorum*, and another anonymous and untitled chronicle known as the Pseudo-Brunetto Latini.

⁶⁰ Barnes “Dante’s Knowledge” 107-113.

sí che 'l sangue facea la faccia sozza,
gridò: «Ricordera'ti anche del Mosca,
che disse, lasso!, “Capo ha cosa fatta.” (*Inferno* XXVIII, 103-108).

In Dante these foundation narratives do not exclude each other; both are integrated into his poetry and forged together seamlessly, sometimes converging to reinforce Dante's ideological and rhetorical goals, in passages relating to Florentine history. The most salient examples will be discussed at length in this chapter.

Like Barnes, Chellini deals almost exclusively with the *Chronica*, with a few references to Sanzane's *Gesta Florentinorum*. However, Chellini is focused on identifying and listing the possible influences of the *Chronica*, in order to demonstrate its importance as a source for Dante's oeuvre, based on the assumption that “[f]u Dante a rivalutare la *Chronica* in poesia, creando i presupposti per la sua riabilitazione storiografica operata da Giovanni Villani.”⁶¹ Thus, the most substantial difference between the works of these two scholars lies in the detailed and systematic ways in which Chellini sets out to prove Dante's indebtedness to the *Chronica*, without attempting to reconstruct Dante's actual historical knowledge on the basis of the corpus of early chronicles still available today.

My standpoint is conspicuously different from both Barnes' and Chellini's. With its focus on identifying the role of historical memories interpreted and reshaped in Dante's poetry, and not merely their reliability as historical 'sources', my approach also contextualizes their relationship to the “sites of memory” – as defined in Chapter One – present in medieval Florentine culture. Indeed, whereas Dante's poetry, along with its spiritual, rhetorical and encyclopaedic resonances, stands out as one of the most remarkable achievements of Florentine culture, my reading also draws attention to the role of Florentine citizens in constructing collective memory as reflected in Dante's poetry. Put more simply, my focus on literary hermeneutics leads me to investigate Dante within the context of Florentine history rather than seeking Florentine history within Dante. This is why I take the list above as a starting point for finding patterns that emerge from the point of view both of collective memory and of references internal to the *Commedia* itself.

This investigation reveals that these passages are usually integrated into episodes of the *Commedia* dealing with the poet's own life and political activity. The most striking are those that incorporate *post-factum* prophecies relating to Dante's life and Florentine politics. First, a concise outline of these episodes in the order in which they appear in the *Commedia*, will provide an overall view of the way they function; a fuller discussion of the most critical episodes is reserved for later. Given the *Chronica*'s centrality in Dante's knowledge of Florentine history, this discussion begins with a list of passages in which precise allusions to it can be glimpsed.

In *Inferno* IV, Dante the poet relates his continued exaltation at the memory of being welcomed within the ranks of the most illustrious poets of classical antiquity:

Colà diritto, sovra 'l verde smalto,
mi fuor mostrati li spiriti magni,
che del vedere in me stesso m'essalto.
I' vidi Elettra con molti compagni,
tra' quali conobbi Ettòr ed Enea,
Cesare armato con gli occhi grifagni.” (*Inferno* IV, 118-123)

This reinforces a point made a few lines earlier:

Da ch'ebber ragionato insieme alquanto,
volsersi a me con salutevol cenno,

⁶¹ Chellini *Chronica* 149.

e 'l mio maestro sorrise di tanto;
 e piú d'onore ancora assai mi fenno,
 ch'e' sí mi fecer de la loro schiera,
 sí ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno." (*Inferno* IV, 97-102)

Typically these two passages relating the pilgrim's experience in the realm of the virtuous pagans ("spiriti magni") have been read in juxtaposition, but the predominant interpretation that the pilgrim is expressing "the excitement he felt" (Durling and Martinez, *Inferno*, 83) cannot fully account for the civic undertone and allusions in these two scenes. Indeed, the first four pagans named in lines 121-123 (Electra, Hector, Aeneas, and Julius Caesar) call to mind the events narrated by the *Chronica* by citing some of its foremost characters and culminating with Caesar, the founder of Florence. Instead of reducing this to Dante's homage to his city, as does Chellini's interpretation that Dante expresses his continuing hope for a return to Florence,⁶² the scene should be read in relation to Dante's authorial self-construction, in general terms as a poet on an equal footing with the classical *auctores*, but more precisely as an epic poet involved in the refashioning and reconstruction of his city's mythologies and narratives.⁶³

Dante grafts this allusion onto his political vision of the empire and communes, and it is significant that, rather than focusing in this first instance of allusions to the historiographic and mythological tradition regarding the city of Florence, this episode extends its scope onto an imperial level by citing important figures in the Roman tradition which spawned Florence. Such a roundabout allusion lays the groundwork for the successive allusions to Florence, an integral element of which is Dante's self-presentation as reconstructor of his civic tradition. The differences between Dante's and Brunetto's representations of Julius Caesar are particularly interesting, a point further developed in the chapter's discussion of how this key character interweaves Florence's foundation mythology with the respective ideologies of the two writers.

Inferno X and *Inferno* XV are connected by a web of allusions to the *Chronica*. In fact, Florence is directly implicated in *Inferno* X, 85-87, along with a precisely identifiable reference to the chronicle tradition. Indeed, in this canto centered around Florentine political strife, the pilgrim's emotionally charged reply to Farinata's prophecy of his exile alludes to the mythological destruction of Florence by Fiesole as initially recounted in the *Chronica*. In *Inferno* XV, 61-78, Brunetto's speech in general, and his prophecy to the pilgrim in particular, are so dense with references both to the *Chronica* and to several other passages within Dante's entire oeuvre on the same issues as to constitute the pivotal episode around which the poem's reworking of the chronicle tradition turns. Moreover, as I have already suggested, the complexity of both cantos' depiction of the *Chronica*'s based theme of Florentines versus Feasulans owes much to the interweaving of this theme with the subsequent conflict between Guelfs and Ghibellines.

Chellini's list of allusions includes *Inferno* XXIV, where the overlapping of the two diachronic themes of origin recurs:

Pistoia in pria d'i Neri si dimagra;
 poi Fiorenza rinova gente e modi.
 Tragge Marte vapor di Val di Magra
 ch'è di torbidi nuvoli involuto;
 e con tempesta impetuosa e agra
 sopra Campo Picen fia combattuto;
 ond'ei repente spezzerà la nebbia,

⁶² Chellini *Chronica* 155.

⁶³ Ascoli *Dante and the Making* 315: my emphasis on Dante's role as a master of civic narratives is part of what Ascoli defines as "the intricacies of the Dantean discourse of authority" in, where he discusses the centrality of the above mentioned passages from *Inferno* IV in the process of self-authorization.

sì ch'ogne bianco ne sarà feruto.
E detto l'ho perché doler ti debbia!" (*Inferno* XXIV 143-151)

The first theme is the enmity between Florence, daughter of Rome, and Pistoia, founded, like Fiesole, by Rome's enemies. The second is the origin of the Florentine factionalism, to which Vanni Fucci's prophecy refers (*Inferno* XXIV, 143-144). The prophecy, in fact, refers to the White-dominated regime's exile of the Blacks from Pistoia in 1301 (the same year the Whites were expelled from Florence) and to the city's fall in 1306, which also had consequences for the Whites exiled from Florence five years earlier, Dante among them.⁶⁴

Dante integrates some elements of the *Chronica's* treatment of Pistoia into Vanni Fucci's political prophecy regarding the ravaged destiny of Florentine politics. More precisely, he takes up the place name "Campo Picen" (l.148) in relation to Pistoia, stigmatizing it, as did the *Chronica* before him, as an anti-Roman city founded by the survivors of Catiline's army.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the *Chronica* explains the etymology of Pistoia in terms of the "pestilential," that is, the 'pestilence' (9.3), resulting from the battle. Even in this case, there is an overlap between the way in which Pistoia was represented in Florentine collective memory and an autobiographical prophecy regarding Dante's in the context of Florentine politics. In fact, canto XXIV closes with a direct attack on the pilgrim: "E detto l'ho perché doler ti debbia!" (151).

A similar overlapping occurs in the following canto with one of the most bitter and hyperbolic invectives by Dante the poet:

Ahi Pistoia, Pistoia, ché non stanzi
d'incenerarti sí che piú non duri,
poi che 'n mal fare il seme tuo avanzi? (*Inferno* XXV, 10-12)

Keeping in mind that *Purgatorio* does not include references to the *Chronica*,⁶⁶ the next allusion appears in *Paradiso* VI, in the emperor Justinian's epic speech regarding the Guelfs and Ghibellines' defiance of the Empire.⁶⁷ Once again, this allusion is connected with the pilgrim's own life, in turn inextricably linked with the *Chronica's* account of the war with Fiesole in the context of Catiline's defeat: "[...] ed a quell colle / sotto 'l qual tu nascesti parve amaro" (53-54). In the context of the Roman political power's triumphal development in the Italian peninsula, Justinian addresses Dante directly citing the Roman destruction of Fiesole ("quel colle"), in contrast with Dante's birthplace as located 'below' ("sotto"), in the Arno Valley.

Finally, both Barnes and Chellini identify a series of precise textual references which appear in Cacciaguida's praise of ancient Florence, where they serve as a prelude to the poem's ultimate prophecy on Dante's destiny (*Par.* XV, 91-99 and 151-154; *Par.* XVI, 46-48; 49-66; 71-72; 124-126; 136-144; and 145-147). The Cacciaguida episode represents the fulfilment of Dante's treatment of his city's narratives, as discussed in Chapter Four, where the preceding analyses function as a starting point for a reading of these passages.

⁶⁴ In fact, before these events, the exiled White Florentines hoped to be restored to Florence through the military support of Pistoia's Whites. The political connection between the Whites of Florence and those of Pistoia culminated in their defeat in the Battle of the Lastra in the summer of 1304, and Dante's suggestion not to attack first drew suspicion on the part of his comrades (Giorgio Petrocchi, *Vita di Dante*, Bari: Laterza 1983, 98 seqq. As primary sources, see Dino Compagni, *Cronica*, III, 30 and G. Villani, *Nuova cronica*, IX lxxii).

⁶⁵ Chellini *Chronica* 157 et seqq. The place name relating to the battle of Catiline was already present in Sallust and in *Li fait des Romains*, but the *Chronica* is unique in relating Campo Piceno with Pistoia, as does Dante in its wake.

⁶⁶ As noted in the list of references identified by Chellini and Barnes, Dante alludes to other chronicles in two passages of the *Purgatorio*.

⁶⁷ It should be remembered that, in accordance with Dante's acceptance of the medieval legal concept of the *translatio imperii*, Constantinople represented the legitimate seat of the Roman Empire.

The pattern underlying the *Commedia*'s rebuilding of Florentine collective memory

The resulting pattern of coincidences of references to the *Chronica* in passages referring to Dante's own circumstances is too compelling to be merely accidental. This raises the question of why Dante alludes to the *Chronica* in such precise overlap with a representation of his life events within the *Commedia*, particularly in the case of prophetic utterances involving his own life. Moreover, the passages where allusions to the *Chronica* occur alongside prophetic utterances frequently refer to the theme of contemporary factionalism as depicted in later chronicles. Certainly, by weaving together prophecy, autobiographical events and Florentine political history, Dante uses his persona as the locus of encounters between civic and religious dimensions. What, then, is his aim in doing so?

A possible answer lies in Dante's dynamic use of the palinodic strategy of authorial self-construction through the simultaneous incorporation of Florentine history and his own life events into the poem.⁶⁸ In other words, reading Dante's pattern of references to Florentine history as palinodic "means reconsidering both the rhetorical organization of Dante's texts and their character as both products and interpretations of history" (280). Alongside the hierarchical and progressive movement suggested by the poem,⁶⁹ we are dealing with a multifaceted rhetorical tool capable of fulfilling different purposes. Thus, what counts is not simply noting the hierarchical order, but also the way in which Dante deals with individual recantatory references to suit his aims. On this basis, my work is indebted to Ascoli's twofold approach which takes into consideration both the hierarchical construction of the itinerary through the device of palinode and the individual instances in which Dante negotiates with the tradition – an approach which examines both the whole and its constitutive parts.

To this I add another layer, one aimed at investigating the ways in which Dante poetically situates himself in relation to the Florentine narratives to which he alludes. In fact, the palinodic construction of his authorial figure is the driving force behind his re-elaboration of the civic tradition and aims to refashion collective memory according to Dante's political and theological beliefs. This also explains why Dante was the first writer intent on recovering and reworking this civic tradition in its entirety, with particular emphasis on the *romanitas* inherent in Florence's origins as told in the *Chronica*.

The first and most immediate contribution of my interpretation lies in its complex analysis of Dante's use of civic narratives, shedding new light on his relationship to the *Chronica*, whose communal pride and anti-imperial agenda have often led critics to assume that Dante inherently disapproved of its political message.⁷⁰ This view confuses Dante's political ideology with the complex ways in which he reappropriates civic narratives. Far from dismissing the divergent political aims of Dante's vision and the *Chronica*'s, one of my reading strategies is that of recognizing Dante's underlying ambivalence in approaching and evaluating this material on a case-by-case basis. Two frequent motivations for Dante's integration of passages from the *Chronica* are: his support of an anti-communal agenda and his reconstruction of a collective memory in accord with his political vision.

⁶⁸ Ascoli *Dante and the Making* points out that the *Commedia* overcomes the *Monarchia*'s "inability to absorb and interpret the materials of history" through its "transhistorical, figural framework ... which also allows Dante openly to assume the prophetic role that he can only hint at for himself in *Monarchia*" (292)

⁶⁹ Ascoli *Dante and the Making* notes that "this structure is a means for representing a series of teleologically shaped histories: Dante's internal creative biography, the literary history of his relations with other poets, as well as the political-social history of his time" (279).

⁷⁰ For example, Rala I. Diakitè's dissertation "Writing Political Realities in Fourteenth-Century Italy: Giovanni Villani's *Nuova Cronica* and Dante's *Commedia*" (Brown University, 2003) dwells on the ways in which "Dante Disinherits his Ancestors" (43-54), explaining on the basis of selected texts, including the *Chronica*, how Dante "would underplay any aspects of the Florentine legend that could serve to strengthen Florence's nationalistic impulses" (43). In so doing, Diakitè expands Nicolai Rubinstein's well-known point in "The beginnings of Political Thought in Florence. A Study in Mediaeval Historiography," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol V (217 et seq.).

In addition to inserting narratives into prophecies, Dante sometimes connects such narratives to other passages of the *Commedia* within a network of historical references that extend beyond Florence's city walls. Thus, alongside Dante's deployment of these references in relation to his fictional *persona*, there are indirect references pertaining either to Florentine history or aspects of contemporary communal life. The list drawn from Barnes and Chellini presents some examples which fit into this scheme. More precisely, these examples can be categorized into "sub-sites of memory" as defined in Chapter One in the sense that they diversify the crucial theme of filial relationship with Rome and ancestral enmity with Fiesole.

One such sub-site concerns the role of other Tuscan cities as either allies or enemies of Florence.

To cite an example not embedded into a prophecy, *Inferno* XXIX compares the vain nature of the Senese to that of the French:

E io dissi al poeta: «Or fu già mai
gente sí vana come la Sanese?
Certo non la Francesca sí d'assai!» (121-123)

These lines resonate with the *Chronica*'s attribution of Siena's origin to the Gauls:

Et dum ibi [*i.e., the Gauls*] morarentur fecerunt duas munitiones in duobus locis ubi secure quiescere valerent, et uterque locus vocatus fuit Sena, qui propter senectutem ibi ipsi homines remanserunt. Et ideo quia creverunt, ita quod adiunxerunt se insimul, fuit declinata hee Sene, harum Senarum, in plurali numero tantum (13.34-38).

Chellini suggests the *Chronica* as its source, even though the presence of this legend in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* once again casts doubt on the 'source.'⁷¹ This example goes hand in hand with the reference to the *Chronica*'s treatment of Pistoia, which reinforces the *Commedia*'s grafting of Florentine traditions onto the Tuscan communal context, particularly in *Inferno*'s Malebolge. In both cases, allusions to the *Chronica* are woven into an *exemplum* featuring a character who embodies and recounts the moral perversions stereotypical of his *civitas*.

In the context of the ideological and military strife between Florence and Siena in the thirteenth century,⁷² Dante the poet and Dante the pilgrim seem to converge in their role as harbingers of a collective memory aimed at uniting the political motivations of the civic chronicles with the universal motivation of moral exemplarity. Dante's role as constructor of 'collective mythography ennobling communal themes from a spiritual standpoint and as mouthpiece for Florence has left traces throughout the centuries. For example, some commentators of the *Commedia* from the sixteenth century onward emphasize that the Senese's lack of sagacity became such a commonplace in Florence that its citizens referred to a nail without a head as a Senese nail.⁷³ One need only remember the stock characters of sixteenth-century Italian comedy to find numerous examples of the same stereotype.

The *Purgatorio* makes two references to the factionalism between Guelfs and Ghibellines in Florence. The first is *Purgatorio* XI's allusion to the Battle of Montaperti in the episode of Provenzano Salvani:

Colui che del cammin sì poco piglia
dinanzi a me, Toscana sonò tutta;
e ora a pena in Siena sen pispiglia,

⁷¹ Chellini *Chronica* 100-101 and 181-182.

⁷² The Ghibelline city of Siena and the Guelf city of Florence clashed in the battle of Montaperti (1260), where Siena triumphed and in Colle Val d'Elsa (1269), where Florence prevailed.

⁷³ As some modern commentators point out, beginning with Gioachino Berthier onwards (see in: Dartmouth Dante Project, http://dante.dartmouth.edu/search_view.php?doc=189251291210&cmd=gotoresult&arg1=4).

ond'era sire quando fu distrutta
la rabbia fiorentina, che superba
fu a quel tempo sì com' ora è putta. (*Purgatorio* XI 109-114)

The second is in *Purgatorio* XIII, where the Senese Sapia's speech revolves around the Battle of Colle Val d'Elsa. Because the Florentine defeated and decapitated Provenzano Salvani during the Battle of Montaperti, the two scenes are implicitly connected:⁷⁴

Eran li cittadin miei presso a Colle
in campo giunti co' loro avversari,
e io pregava Iddio di quell ch'e' volle.
Rotti fuor quivi e vòliti ne li amari
passi di fuga; [...] (115-119)

Both passages allude to the friction between Guelfs and Ghibellines and, curiously, both passages concern the Ghibelline city of Siena – one of the most powerful communes that threatened Florence's Tuscan supremacy during the Trecento. One might wonder why the mythological events relating to early Florentine history, so abundant in *Inferno*, are taken up again in *Paradiso* but are not found in the middle canticle. The strong connection between the mountain of Purgatory and the world of the living explains this: “[u]nlike the denizens of *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, those in *Purgatorio* exist in real, present time” (Hollander, *Purgatorio* xx).

Indeed, as Hollander goes on to argue, time itself is a powerful, all-encompassing force binding each soul in Purgatory while providing the theological and ritual framework for its salvation. John Scott synthesizes this historical consistency in *Purgatorio*, inserting it within the political trajectory through the poem:

[T]he ascent from the particular to the universal: decadence of Florence at the center of Hell; halfway through Purgatory, decadence in central and northern Italy leading to the cause of universal corruption in 1300; and, in the middle of the *Paradiso*, we find an *exemplum* of ancient Florence, the good city to whom the poet remained attached with every fiber of his being.⁷⁵

In other words, neither *Inferno*'s distortion of the past nor *Paradiso*'s erasure of time has the upper hand in the middle canticle, where replication of historical events framed in time and space leaves little room for the exemplary use of foundational mythologies.

Another important aspect of this pattern is apparent in the way Dante deals with Florentine history. Indeed, throughout the *Commedia* Dante connects the problematic relationship between Florence and Rome to his political and theological vision. Rather than reducing the their relationship to a matter of foundational filiation in the grey area between mythology and history, Dante's representation of Florence and Rome extends to an allegorical level, with Florence as *civitas diaboli* and Rome as *civitas Dei*, especially in *Inferno* and *Paradiso*.⁷⁶ Moreover, the theological meanings that this duality implies are interwoven with such collective figurations consistent with Dante's political agenda concerning the concurrent roles of Church and Empire, in a scenario which also involved the dramatic factionalism of Italian communes.

However widespread this network is throughout the first and third canticles of the *Commedia*, my survey of the references identified by Barnes and Chellini reveals that *Inferno* XV

⁷⁴ John A. Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, 145.

⁷⁵ Scott *Dante's Political Purgatory* 149.

⁷⁶ The vast bibliography on this subject notably includes Claire E. Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City. The Poetry of Citizenship in Dante*, London: Legenda, 2006, where she presents a detailed account of the criticism on this matter (1-13).

and *Paradiso* XV-XVII are the key cantos with respect to Florence's foundation, that is, Brunetto's and Cacciaguada's episodes, respectively. Dante's political ideology must be taken into account in discussing these episodes, where the relationship between Florence and Rome permeates Dante's complex reelaboration of the earliest Florentine chronicle.

Dante meets Brunetto: *fabula* overwhelms *historia*

Dante's representation of Brunetto in *Inferno* XV has received a number of interpretations, from filial sympathy to fierce irony. Without excluding other interpretations that have been offered, my interpretation emphasizes the canto's irony and argues that behind this irony is Dante's desire to criticize his teacher's distortion of historiography in accordance with his personal ideology. Both Barnes and Chellini point out precise references to the *Chronica* in the final part of Brunetto's speech:⁷⁷

Ma quello ingrato popolo maligno
che discese di Fiesole *ab antiquo*,
e tiene ancor del monte e del macigno,
ti si farà, per tuo ben far, nimico;
ed è ragion, ché tra li lazzi sorbi
si disconvien fruttare al dolce fico.
Vecchia fama nel mondo li chiama orbi;
gent'è avara, invidiosa e superba:
dai lor costumi fa che tu ti forbi.
La tua fortuna tanto onor ti serba,
che l'una parte e l'altra avranno fame
di te; ma lungi fia dal becco l'erba.
Faccian le bestie fiesolane strame
di lor medesme, e non tocchin la pianta,
s'alcuna surge ancora in lor letame,
in cui riviva la sementa santa
di que' Roman che vi rimaser quando
fu fatto il nido di malizia tanta». (*Inferno* XV, 61-78)

Chellini argues that the *Chronica* serves as one of Dante's sources, and I would add that this can be reinforced by noting that the adjective "ingrato" attached to the Faesulan "popolo maligno" has been traditionally interpreted as referring to the ill treatment reserved by that city for Dante's political efforts.⁷⁸

Indeed, it can also be read as an allusion to the episode in the *Chronica* relating that after destroying Fiesole, the Romans permitted the remaining Faesulans to live, despite their past military

⁷⁷ Barnes "Dante's Knowledge" 98-99; Chellini *Chronica* 163-67.

⁷⁸ In his analysis, Chellini *Chronica* notes that "[l]'antica discesa dei Fiesolani dal colle al piano è un'idea tratta dalla *Chronica*, secondo la quale i Fiesolani, dopo l'assedio di Cesare, concordarono di abbandonare la loro antica sede, scendere nella piana e fondare una nuova città insieme con i Romani." Furthermore, Chellini connects his analysis in particular to *Chronica* 7, 47-51 (*Chronica* 164). Moreover, he sees a confirmation for that acknowledgment by Dante in *Epistola* VI: "O miserrima Fesulanorum propago, et iterum iam punita barbaries." Then he rightly points out that the epistle faithfully follows the *Chronica* in relating that Fiesole was punished twice ("iterum") because that text narrates "due assedi, quello fittizio di Cesare e quello reale del 1125, e narra che entrambi si risolsero con la distruzione e l'abbandono di Fiesole" (164). The coincidence that Dante also cites the *Chronica* in his epistle to the "scelestissimi" Florentines requires further discussion.

opposition to the legitimate Roman power, on the condition that they leave their ravaged city behind and mix with the Romans in the newly founded *Florentia*:⁷⁹

Ita obsessa fuit ipsa civitas ab eo [*i.e.*, *Caesar*] et suis per spatium VIII annorum [...]. Et in capite ipsius finis, Fesulani cum Cesare et Romanis ad hanc concordiam devenerunt, quod ex Romanis et Fesulanis deberet fieri una civitas [...]. (7, 46-50)

Et ita fuit destructa civitas Fesule et ex Romanis et Fesulanis est alia civitas facta. (8, 52-53)

The Romans' benignity notwithstanding, several centuries later the Faesulans in turn took advantage of Totila's destruction of Florence, rebuilding their city in its original location and hence resuming their status as a threat to Florence:

Et [*Totila*] ivit cum suis milibus in locum ubi fuerat civitas Fesule, et ibi posuit suum vexillum, statuens quod quisquis vellet ibi domum construere, quod in ea posset libere habitare, cupiens quod civitas Fesule popularetur et rehedificaretur, credens Romani inde inferre iniuriam et gravamen, et propterea quod non rehedificaretur ulterius civitas Florentina. (10, 26-31)

Blending history and legend, the *Chronica* ends its account of the tensions between Florence and Fiesole the description of Fiesole's obliteration in 1125:

Et ita per quingendos annos et plus stetit postea civitas Fesulana et civitas Florentina. Postea crevit inimicitia maxima inter eos, ita quod Florentini nocturno tempore absentaverunt se circa civitatem Fesule, et cum homines exhibant extra civitatem Fesule, summo mane Florentini ex improvise intraverunt eandem civitatem Fesule. (12, 1-6)

This detail substantiates Dante's indebtedness to the chronicle tradition, which in this case should be read in light of Dante's choice to locate this set of allusions within Brunetto's speech. This is undeniably a carefully constructed authorial choice, and it is important to keep in mind the plethora of relevant Florentine citizens whom the pilgrim meets in *Inferno* and whom the poet might have chosen for that purpose, either instead of or in conjunction with Brunetto. Further emphasizing this choice, Dante sets the stage in *Inferno X*'s exchange between the pilgrim and Farinata for the prophetic theme that emerges in the pilgrim's interaction with Brunetto in *Inferno XV*. Both Farinata and Brunetto prophesy Dante's exile, and the allusions to the Florentine chronicles in both episodes emphasize Dante's relationship with his native city.

The first example of prophecy in the context of Dante's autobiography appears in *Inferno X*, where, after the pilgrim tells Farinata that the Uberti family has been exiled from Florence, Farinata expresses anguish and asks him to explain why, and in the meantime prophesies that his interlocutor is doomed to the same fate. From the perspective of allusions to the Florentine chronicles, the pilgrim's response to Farinata's inquiry is especially significant:

Ond'io a lui: "Lo strazio e 'l grande scempio
che fece l'Arbia colorata in rosso,
tal orazion fa far nel nostro tempio." (85-87)

Reflecting on the longstanding debate regarding the sources of Dante's allusion here to the chronicles, Chellini reports the various possibilities that have been advanced about his literary *topos*, ranging from an anonymous Senese chronicle on the battle of Montaperti to the Roman

⁷⁹ Barnes "Dante's Knowledge" 98 colorfully describes the Faesulans as "homeless" after the war between Catiline and Caesar according to the *Chronica*'s passages cited above.

historian Florus's discussion of the battle of *Aquae Sextiae* (102 b.C). He then proceeds to argue that this passage alludes to the *Chronica*.

Chellini is probably right, for at least two reasons. First, it has not been established that Dante knew either the Senese chronicle or the work of Florus, and, even if his knowledge of these sources were proven, the reasons for citing this passage in this context would need to be substantiated. Second, as Chellini points out, "soltanto la *Chronica* fornisce l'immagine diretta del fiume rosseggiante, mentre i citati scrittori antichi e la cronaca senese si limitano a parlare di acque insanguinate".⁸⁰ The *Chronica* in fact relates that Totila:

xx milia hominum nobilium dicte civitatis [*Florence*] fecit in dicto Capitolio decollari et in ipsam aquam que currebat subtus ipsum Capitolium proici, et non fuit aliter cognitum nisi quando aqua dicti fluminis cepit rubescere propter sanguinem interfectorum.

Of course, the fact that the *Chronica* serves as the most literally precise source does not exclude the possibility that Dante had additional chronicles in mind when formulating this passage. Beyond this, and more importantly, the coincidence on the literal level is further corroborated by its consistency with a civic tradition represented by the *Chronica* and which not only lay at the foundation of Florentine collective memory, but also, as we have seen, served repeatedly as a point of reference for Dante when he inserted his own life events into the poem. In other words, Dante's references to early Florentine history and to his own life support each other reciprocally in the course of the poem, and this reciprocal support is aimed at the construction of an authorial figure. Whereas Ascoli rightly emphasizes Dante's impulse to rival the classical and Biblical authorities, I make the complementary but distinct point that he individuates himself as author against the background of a collective, communal tradition.

Beyond the importance of establishing the exact sources at stake in Dante's construction, the understanding of such a construction requires a discussion of the range of allusions to the wider tradition which shaped Dante as a citizen and to which he explicitly refers. For example, the mention of the Uberti family in a particular version of the *Libro fiesolano* (the generic title given to vernacular versions of the *Chronica*) further reinforces the pattern of cross-referencing between the Farinata and the Brunetto episodes, contributing to the overall structure in which Dante inserts himself within both his poem and narratives of Florentine history. In fact, as Barnes points out, a specific version of "the *Libro fiesolano* has Catiline survive ... and become the ancestor of the Uberti family (of which Farinata was a member), via his son Uberto Cesare who ... was readmitted to Rome ... and subsequently ruled Florence in Rome's name."⁸¹

Of course, while it is well established that Dante knew the *Chronica*, we cannot be certain that he was familiar with any of the vernacular versions that explicitly cited the Uberti family. However, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it was precisely the public nature of its chronicles that shaped Florence's cultural memory, favoring the oral circulation of narratives pertaining to the most prominent families, making it likely that some version of this narrative reached Dante. What really matters is the presence of the allusions in *Inferno* X to the Florentine chronicle tradition in the context of the pilgrim and Farinata's dramatic debate concerning recent Florentine events. This is just one instance drawn from the many different functions which the poem attributes to civic history in relation to the pilgrim's interactions with his fellow citizens, especially if we keep in mind that both Farinata and Brunetto belonged to the same *milieu*.

⁸⁰ Chellini *Chronica* 183.

⁸¹ Barnes "Dante's Knowledge" 98. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Uberti family's epos can be read only in one of the three extant manuscript copies of the *Libro fiesolano*. See, Gros' "La plus ancienne version de 'Il libro fiesolano' (la Légende des Origines), par le soins de Colette Gros," *Letteratura italiana antica*, Roma: Moxedano Editrice 2004 (14). The ms. with the Uberti narrative is the Marucellianus 300 C; for the complete list of the mss., see Gros "La plus ancienne" 17.

Having established the centrality of the overlap between the autobiographical events woven into key prophetic moments in the poem and the references to the Florentine chronicle tradition, the significance of the Brunetto episode can be better understood through a close reading of Brunetto's speech in relation to the historical Brunetto Latini's works. When the pilgrim meets Brunetto on the burning sands, he ironically expresses surprise at meeting a figure so venerable from both a *personal* and *social* perspective: "Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?" (l. 30, emphasis added).⁸² Previous readings have largely underestimated the irony stemming from the scene's highly fictional nature, which results from the blatant divergence of Dante the poet, who carefully constructs the episode, from the pilgrim, whom he presents as naively surprised to see his old master in such an 'unexpected' place.

Brunetto Latini is historically well-known as the Florentine master of civic rhetoric who prepared generations of Florentines, Dante among them, for active participation in public life during the second half of the thirteenth century. This can be seen both directly, through Brunetto's personal relationship with young Florentines, and indirectly, through the teachings imparted in his most important works. But *Inferno* XV presents Brunetto as a subverted character, insofar as the former pupil (Dante) takes assumes the role of the former master (Brunetto), and vice versa. On a literal level, the fictional gap presented at their meeting is subsequently overcome when Brunetto claims his willingness to lag for the time being behind his running mates, treading in Dante's footsteps:

E quelli: «O figliuol mio, non ti dispiaccia
se Brunetto Latino un poco teco
ritorna 'n dietro e lascia andar la traccia» (*Inferno* XV 31-33).

My interpretation enriches the reading of this passage, moving from a literal to a tropological level with respect to the role assumed by Dante the poet, representing himself as a point of reference for his civic community.

In fact, whereas the pilgrim seems to position himself as studying at the feet of Brunetto, in actuality it is Dante who is above, on the pathway through the flaming sands, and Brunetto who stands with his eyes at the level of the hem of Dante's garment. Thus, my hypothesis is twofold. First, the poet portrays a degenerate master whose ideology and values contributed to the city's eventual moral and political decline. Second, Dante now replaces him as master of civic virtues, emphasizing his own civic role by incorporating allusions to the Florentine chronicles. Thus, Brunetto's response to the pilgrim's inquiry reinforces the irony of their greeting, since it alludes to Brunetto's ultimate failure as a civic educator.

It should be noted that this perspective excludes, at least for the moment, the long-standing interpretive crux of Brunetto's 'sodomy' and its relationship with some sort of dissolute sexual activity, whether homosexual or not.⁸³ The obscurity of such allusions has been acknowledged from the time of the earliest commentators, who remarked on the impossibility of finding any documentary evidence to establish such a relationship. At the same time, other critics have asserted that Brunetto's 'sodomy' refers not to any sexual perversion but rather to a twofold civic one: his attempt to benefit himself and his family primarily and his city only secondarily, and his focus on Florence as an autonomous commune without reference to the empire.⁸⁴

⁸² It is important to remember that the pilgrim reserves the use of *voi* to a very few highly esteemed characters in the *Commedia* and that the title *ser* pertained to the notarial class.

⁸³ James Brundage *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, notes that "[s]odomy ... included all kinds of deviant sex practices, but ... was also used in a more specific sense to mean anal sex" (376).

⁸⁴ Among the scholarship downplaying the sexual aspects of Brunetto's perversion in favor of linguistic and/or civic perversion, some notable instances include André Pezard, *Dante sous la pluie de feu*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1950; Francesca Guerra D'Antoni, *Dante's Burning Sands. Some New Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991;

Dante clearly hints at Brunetto's perversity, both sexual and political. However, excluding either the sexual or the political aspect of this perversion based solely on textual evidence yields an inadequate interpretation. Of course, unless heretofore unknown historical sources about Brunetto's personal life emerge, this problem is unlikely to be resolved. My interpretation focuses on civic matters addressed in the chronicles, and so resonates with the civic perversion which some scholars attribute to Brunetto; yet its larger aim is to explain Dante's irony in counterposing himself against his former master by capitalizing on a shared civic tradition. This leads us to the question of exactly how Dante's criticism of Brunetto is related to his drawing on the Florentine chronicles.

Florence's foundation in Brunetto's *Tresor*: a failed attempt at myth-making

In order to answer this question, it must first be emphasized that in *Inferno* XV, the fictional Brunetto makes clear references to Florentine foundation narratives. This matter has been debated in relatively little scholarship, especially considering its relation with the ways in which the historical Brunetto dealt with Florence's foundation in his encyclopedic treatise, written first in French (*Tresor*) and then rendered into Italian (*Tesoro*, as it is referred to in *Inferno* XV) by a compiler whose identity remains debated to this day.⁸⁵ While some scholars have read the Brunetto episode in terms of Dante the pilgrim's filial sympathy for Brunetto, I focus on the utterly polemic and ironic function of the pilgrim's response, a point which has often been neglected or undermined by scholarship, especially in relation to Florence's foundation.⁸⁶

Thus, Dante's irony can be better understood if read as a rhetorically shaped ideological reaction to chapter 37 ("De la conjuroison Cathe[l]ine") of the *Tresor*'s first book, where the foundation of Florence is nestled within a summary of universal history. Before proceeding on to a detailed reading of Dante's poetry, with both the historical Brunetto's oeuvre and the previous chronicle tradition as interdiscursive background, a review of Florence's foundation as developed by Brunetto sheds new interpretive light on the matter in its diachronic linking of the *Chronica*, Brunetto's *Tresor* and Dante's *Commedia*.

The presence of the theme of Florence's foundation, both in *Inferno* XV and in the section of the *Tresor* dealing with the larger context of Roman history, should not be regarded as mere coincidence. Brunetto is notably involved in both the historical Brunetto who wrote the *Tresor* and the fictional Brunetto who is a central character in *Inferno* XV. This fact cannot be dismissed aprioristically as obvious, since it calls attention to the poet's awareness of his rhetorical indebtedness to the historical Brunetto, and to his choice to set his master on a completely different rhetorical and exemplary level from that of any other Florentine character inhabiting his *Inferno*. Indeed, readings of *Inferno* XV that emphasize the pilgrim's affection and sympathy for his former master run the risk of placing the episode in a historical void. This void can be filled by acknowledging the *Chronica* as the only confirmed historical source used by Brunetto with regard to Florence's foundation.⁸⁷

Gregory B. Stone, "Sodomy, Diversity, Cosmopolitanism: Dante and the Limits of the *Polis*," *Dante Studies* (2005), 89-132.

⁸⁵ According to Julia Bolton Holloway, Brunetto himself compiled the *Tesoro* (*Twice-Told Tales: Brunetto Latino and Dante Alighieri*, New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 8 seqq.). By contrast, Alison Cornish argues that Dante knew the *Tesoro* but not the *Tresor* (*Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy. Illiterate Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 126-157). I cautiously prefer to cite the critical edition in French (Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, ed. Pietro G. Beltrami, Paolo Squillaciotti, Plinio Torri e Sergio Vatteroni, Torino: Einaudi, 2007), because no reliable critical edition of the *Tesoro* is currently available and Cornish's hypothesis needs further inquiry.

⁸⁶ Readers typically insist on the pilgrim's compassion, with the notable recent exception of Massimo Verdicchio, "Re-reading Brunetto Latini and *Inferno* XV," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* XXI.1 (2000): 61-81. Verdicchio discusses Dante's ironic representation of Brunetto in light of the *Commedia*'s satirical representations of Brunetto's works.

⁸⁷ Chellini *Chronica* 145-150.

I hypothesize that Brunetto's response to his city's traditions in chapter 37 of the *Tresor* – aimed, as we saw in Chapter One, at forging a proud communal collective memory already in exemplary fashion embodied in the Florentine *Chronica* – is twofold. On the one hand, he works in concert with the *Chronica*'s civic quality and purpose, for example at representing the role of the Senate and other civic institutions along the same lines as those of the earlier text, in his praise of those institutions in accordance with the shared communal ideology. On the other hand, in wilfully ignoring the role of Caesar, along with other details in the *Chronica* which point to Rome's role in Florence's foundation and its urban and civic development, Brunetto's account of his city's mythology emphasizes that bellicosity and factionalism lay at its very foundation.

Indeed, this is precisely what he asserts in Chapter 36 of the *Tresor*, right after briefly treating the matter of Florence's foundation:

Et sachiez que la place de la terre ou Florence siet fu jadis apelee Chiés Mars, c'est a dire maisons de bataille, car Mars, qui est une des .vii. planetes, est apellé dieu de bataille; et ensi fu il aorés ancienement. Por ce n'est il mie mervoille se les florentins sont tozjors en guerre et descordes, car cele planete regne sor els.⁸⁸

It is noteworthy that Dante shares this silence concerning Florence's founder with Brunetto, whose discussion of early Florentine history in the *Tresor* acknowledges that the Romans founded the city right after they defeated and killed Catiline and his followers, without citing any specific person as responsible for that foundation.⁸⁹ Rather than naming the founder, Brunetto weaves a symbolic connection between a geographical feature and the bellicose nature of the city as an enduring consequence of that feature. Strangely enough, the narrative voice of Brunetto immediately follows this mythological explanation with the only explicit claim of truthfulness in the whole *Tresor*, justifying it on the basis of his own political experience: "De ce doit maistre Brunet Latin savoir la verité, car il en est nes, et si estoit en exil, lors que il compila cest livre, por achoison de la guerre as florentins" (68). Thus, one may well wonder why Brunetto expresses such an ardent need to justify his version of Florence's foundation.

This complex question assumes an awareness of the ideological implications that the mythologies of Florence's foundation could have for Brunetto, and on this basis we can explore the readings provided on that topic by Dante. In fact, if Brunetto's account of the bellicose nature of Florence can be methodologically attributed to the common medieval criterion of analogy by symbolic relationship between phenomena and their meanings, I argue that Dante could have objected to this explanation based on his critical view of Brunetto's republican ideology. Moreover, Brunetto's deterministic description of Florence's character in terms of pagan values excludes any possibility of individual or collective free will on the part of Florentines. It goes without saying that this did not particularly resonate with Dante's Christian perspective. Indeed, it does not take much imagination to conclude that, from Dante's standpoint, Brunetto represents Florence as a self-referential commune divorced from any sense of a larger divine plan.

The demise of collective voice: the episode of the anonymous Florentine suicide

The relationship between the *Commedia* and the *Tresor* can better be understood by examining the Brunetto episode alongside *Inferno* XV and *Inferno* XIII and XIV, thus revealing the larger pattern. Setting the stage for Dante's allusion to Brunetto's version of Florence's foundation, in cantos XIII

⁸⁸ Latini *Tresor* 68.

⁸⁹ Latini *Tresor*: "Aprés ce asegerent les romains la cité de Fiesle, tant que il la vainquirent et mistrent en sa subjection; et lors firent il enmi le plain qui est après des hautes roches ou cele citez seoit une autre cite, qui ores est apelee Florence" (68).

and XIV, an anonymous Florentine suicide credits Mars as the original founder and protector of Florence, referring to a statue thought to represent Mars that was washed away by a flood in 1333:

I' fui de la città che nel Batista
mutò 'l primo padrone; ond'ei per questo
sempre con l'arte sua la farà trista;
e se non fosse che 'n sul passo d'Arno
rimane ancor di lui alcuna vista,
que' cittadin che poi la rifondrno
sovra 'l cener che d'Attila rimase,
avrebber fatto lavorare indarno. (*Inferno* XIII, 143-150)

It is not by chance that this recurring theme introduces and immediately precedes Dante and Virgil's entrance into the circle of burning sand to which Brunetto is condemned.

Further adding to the significance of this scene, the anonymous Florentine suicide cites the *Chronica's* topos of Attila's destruction of Florence, another sub-site of collective memory emerging as early as *Inferno* XII, where the king of the Huns is cited among the souls of tyrants immersed in the Phlegeton: "La divina giustizia di qua punge / quel'Attila che fu flagello in terra" (133-134). It should be noted that while the names Attila and Totila were used interchangeably in the Middle Ages,⁹⁰ Dante separates the two figures, using the name of Totila to refer specifically to Florence's traumatic destruction during his own times and the name of Attila more generically in the context of collective memory. Furthermore, Totila appears only in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, while Attila appears only in the *Commedia*.

More specifically, in the *De vulgari eloquentia's* discussion of the construction of poetic verse, Dante names Totila rather than Attila in referring to the historical destroyer of Florence during the High Middle Ages:

[E]st et sapidus et venustus etiam et excelsus, qui est dictatorum illustrium, ut "Eiecta maxima parte florum de sinu tuo, Florentia, nequicquam Trinacriam Totila secundus adivit" (II VI 5).

There is something ironic in the fact that Dante's most elevated example of versification refers to Charles of Valois as a second destroyer of Florence, a second Totila.⁹¹ Indeed, Charles of Valois's entrance into Florence in November of 1301 led to Dante's exile. The pattern of allusions to Florentine history extends beyond the *Commedia* into other Dantean works and emerges alongside autobiographical ones, even if the technical nature of the treatise excludes a reference to prophecy in this passage alluding to experiences connected with Dante's life.

In sharp contrast with the irony Dante directs at Brunetto and at Charles of Valois as 'second Totila,' there is no discernible irony in his representation of the suicide's inaccurate perception of Florentine history,⁹² and, notwithstanding Dante's awareness of the inaccuracy, what the suicide relates was based on the collective sense of Florentine identity and history founded on the narratives presented in the *Chronica*. In fact, in the privileged position at the beginning of *Inferno* XIV, the pilgrim displays sympathy for this damned soul:

Poi che la carità del natio loco

⁹⁰ Manlio Pastore Stocchi "Totila." ED Vol. IV, Roma 1971. See also Thomas Maisen, "Attila, Totila e Carlo Magno tra Dante, Villani, Boccaccio e Malispini. Per la genesi di due leggende erudite." *Archivio storico italiano* Pt. 152 (561-639).

⁹¹ Chellini *Chronica* 157.

⁹² According to D'Ovidio *Studi sulla Divina Commedia*, Milano: Sandron, 1901, for example, Dante has this character make such a mistake in order to represent him as a garrulous simpleton who does not go beyond popular tales.

mi strinse, raunai le fronde sparte
e rende'le a colui, ch'era già fioco. (*Inferno* XIV 1-3)

There are both notable similarities and differences between the scene in cantos XIII-XIV and the scene in canto XV, keeping in mind that the anonymous suicide serves the narrative function of introducing the Brunetto episode, in terms of the Florentine theme and location. Beginning with the similarities, both characters are damned Florentines placed within the sequence Farinata-anonymous suicide-Brunetto, in which the Florentine chronicles play a significant role. However, a clear difference emerges in that the anonymous Florentine suicide is represented as 'passive' while Brunetto is represented as 'active.'

Most obviously, the anonymous suicide is confined passively to his bush, whereas Brunetto is forced to run ceaselessly through the burning sands. In both cases, the contrappasso represents an eternal sterility, one characterized by a vegetative state preventing the condemned soul from interacting with his environment, and the other by a state of constant but unproductive motion. More subtly, however, the anonymous suicide accepts passively and without hesitation the collective myth-making shared by his fellow citizens, whereas Brunetto actively fashions and propagates the image of Florentines as a pagan and bellicose people.

From an allegorical standpoint, the pilgrim's compliance with the suicide's request to gather up the branches of his bush can be read as going beyond mere pity for a fellow citizen, as commentators have long noted. Indeed, in Dante's implicit role of standardbearer of Florentine collective identity, the pilgrim responds to the suicide's deeply rooted, albeit superstitious, loyalty to traditional myths about Florence and rewards him, compassionately restoring his identity by returning his displaced branches to him. While the pilgrim feels pity for several of the damned souls he encounters, the *Commedia* rarely portrays him as acting in accordance with their will.⁹³

In interpreting this canto, commentators and scholars have traditionally focused on identifying this character by name, offering various explanations for Dante's reluctance to name him. For example, both Benvenuto and Boccaccio asserted that Dante withheld the name because this sin was so prevalent in the city that any single suicide was a good representation of all. Considering Dante's explicit naming of specific exponents of 'sodomy,' another sin notoriously prevalent in Florence,⁹⁴ this argument is not fully convincing. I argue, however, that the anonymity is better accounted for by noting that this soul is more representative of a common repertoire of memories than of a common sin. In other words, Dante's aim was not so much to show the punishment of a specific sinner, as to display the moral defeat of communal collective memory.

A hidden distortion of the communal traditions in the *Tresor*: the case of Caesar

From Dante's ideologically charged point of view, both the anonymous Florentine in *Inferno* XIII and XIV and Brunetto in *Inferno* XV can be seen as exponents of a communal memory whose failure can be traced back to lack of compliance with the divine plan for a political world order and peace guaranteed by the empire. On the one hand, the pilgrim's pious sympathy towards the anonymous Florentine gives value to the identity-building aspects of the community's collective memories, while the poet deliberately emphasizes the distortions he has his character naively

⁹³ To emphasize how exceptional this gesture is on the pilgrim's part, it is worth remembering that this compassionate action is in stark contrast, for example, with his treatment of Frate Alberigo in Malebolge: "Ma distendi oggimai in qua la mano; / aprimi li occhi.' E io non gliel' apersi; / e cortesia fu lui esser villano." (*Inferno* XXXIII, 148-150).

⁹⁴ Cestaro remarks that during the fourteenth century, Florentine authorities were preoccupied with "the amount of sodomitic activity in the city had reached a critical point and worried that Florence's reputation for male-male sex had grown to international dimensions. The German word *Florenzer*, it seems, was a synonym for 'sodomite.'" (92). See Cestaro, "Queering Nature, Queering Gender: Dante and Sodomy," *Dante for the new Millenium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey, New York: Fordham UP, 2003, 90-114.

express, not least of which is confusing Attila with Totila. On the other hand in *Inferno* XV, the pilgrim shows apparent deference toward his ‘master,’ while the poet responds ironically to what he perceives as Brunetto’s willful and malicious distortion of the traditional narratives explaining Florence’s foundation. A peculiar example of Brunetto’s civic mythopoiesis is the figure of Julius Caesar in Chapter 37 of the *Tresor*.

While the anonymous Florentine’s distinguishing feature is precisely his lack of personal identity, crucial for both Dante the poet and Brunetto is the display of a welldefined individuality, understood in terms that are at once personal and collective, as are the values they intended to forge. Thus in Chapter 37 Brunetto parallels the *Chronica*’s earlier account by uncovering Catiline’s conspiracy, his flight to Tuscany and the shelter he found in Fiesole, followed by his battle with the Roman troops which were soon sent there, his defeat and death, and the foundation of Pistoia at the site of the battle:

Quant la conjuroison fu discoverte et le povoir [Kateline] fu afoibli, il s’enfoi en Toscane, en une cité qui avoit a nom Fiesle, et la fist reveler contre Rome; mes les romains i envoierent grandisme ost, et troverent Catheline au pié des montaignes ou tot son ost et sa gent cele part ou est ores la citez Pistoie. La fu Cathe[l]ine vaincus en bataille et mort lui et les siens; neis une grant partie des romains i fu occise, et por le pestrine de cele grant occasion fu la citez apelee Pisto[ir]e. (37, I)

Brunetto subsequently recounts the siege of Fiesole on the mountains and its eventual destruction by the Romans, who then build in the lower valley the new settlement of Florence:

Aprés ce asegerent les romains la cité de Fiesle, tant que il la vainquirent et mistrent en sa subjection; et lors firent il enmi le plain qui est après des autes roches ou cele citez seoit une autre cité, qui ores est apelee Florence. (37, II)

Even though the story of Catiline and Florence is found in other writings by Brunetto,⁹⁵ it is in the *Tresor* (and its vernacular translation, the *Tesoro*) that it is directly and extensively narrated. Moreover, the first book of the *Tresor* (chapters 6-93) and the *Chronica* share the task of recounting Florence’s foundation within the framework of universal history, and from a strictly commune-centered perspective, as opposed to Dante’s Empire-centered political perspective.

To go beyond the obvious structural parallelism between the two texts, it must first be ascertained whether Brunetto knew the *Chronica*, and if so, to what extent it was a source for his knowledge of early Florentine history. There are some precise textual references which, in addition to the *Chronica*’s proven cultural role in building Florentine communal identity during the thirteenth century, establish the indebtedness of Brunetto’s *Tresor* to that text.⁹⁶ Even though it is acknowledged that the French prose narrative *Li fet des Romains* – politically ‘neutral’ at least with regard to the Italian communal situation in relation to the Empire – was Brunetto’s main source for the Catiline episode:

[Brunetto] desunse dalla *Chronica* sia la paretimologia di Pistoia da ‘peste’, sia la notizia della sottomissione di Fiesole da parte dei Romani, sia quella della fondazione di Firenze in un luogo chiamato “Chiés Mars” [...] L’affermazione che i fiorentini antichi riservavano un

⁹⁵ Holloway *Twice-Told Tales* argues that “Brunetto’s translations from Sallust, his Sallustian *Catilinaria* alongside his Ciceronian *Orazioni*, and his translation from Cicero’s *De inventione* and its commentaries as *La Rettorica*, and likewise the chronicle sections in the French *Tresor* and the Italian *Tesoro*, and even its versified version, all stress the story of Catiline and Florence” (181).

⁹⁶ Chellini *Chronica* 145-146.

culto speciale a Marte, pianeta e dio delle battaglie, servì quindi a Brunetto per spiegare il clima di discordia che affliggeva la città al suo tempo.⁹⁷

Because the genealogical relationship between those two texts is already convincingly established, it is more important to examine Brunetto's use of the tradition and his ideological response to the *Chronica* than to determine the precise references.

In fact, one cannot help but notice that Brunetto's narration is extremely laconic compared to the *Chronica*'s, and that, for example, of all the characters traditionally involved in the foundation of Florence, he names only Catiline. This point is especially striking considering the *Chronica*'s insistence on details, particularly with respect to the military role of Caesar and his lieutenants, and the centuries-long conflict between Florence and Fiesole stemming from Catiline's treachery and defeat. Such insistence draws attention to its silence on Caesar's central role in Florence's foundation: clearly Brunetto's choice is deliberate and offers clues to the motives behind his refashioning of this sensitive matter.

Thus, keeping in mind that both Dante and Brunetto drew from the *Chronica*, the weight of Dante's criticism of Brunetto can be better understood if we examine the *Tresor*'s account of Florence's foundation, which Brunetto inserts within the framework of universal history. Chapters 36 and 38 recount Caesar's role in the preceding and subsequent events, whereas Chapter 37 narrates Florence's foundation and the events leading up to it. What is most striking is that from a narrative standpoint this section allows readers to skip seamlessly from chapter 36 to 38. It gives the sense that Florence's foundation has been inserted incidentally within the narrative of Caesar's deeds. In a sense, then, it appears to be a digression from the narrative thread of universal history.

More precisely, rather than relying on the only civic source on Florence's ancient history, in chapter 37 Brunetto chooses to lay a veil of silence over it, substituting the civic narrative with his own subjective point of view. In so doing, the *Tresor* emphasizes Caesar's remarkable political gains in the aftermath of Catiline's conspiracy, at the expense of a more detailed exposition of Florence's foundation. Such an emphasis on the connection between Catiline's conspiracy and Caesar's consequent increased personal power belongs specifically to Brunetto. It is not present, for example, in the other authoritative medieval source on Roman history on which Brunetto relied in his writings, that is, *Li fet des Romains*. At most, Brunetto might have drawn from *Li fet des Romains* details relating to the complicity between Caesar and Catiline to reinforce his unique point of view on the matter.⁹⁸

On closer examination, Chapter 36 ("De Romulus et des Romains") epitomizes the history of Rome beginning with its mythical founder, whose personal story it relates in detail, with particular attention given to the acts of violence which led him to seize power over the newly founded city. After defeating Amulius and restoring the kingdom to his grandfather and legitimate heir of Aeneas, Numitorem, Romulus kills him and usurps the throne. Thereafter, in sequence, "Remus son frere, et puis le pere sa feme, qui estoit sires dou temple des sacrifices dou païs" (66): violence for personal ends is compounded by his moral impiety, directed against members of his family who served as religious figures.

Then, it focuses on the politically critical transition from monarchy to republic, and eventually to imperial power, stressing once again that the passage from monarchy to republic was due to a notorious act of violence perpetrated by the last king, "Tarquins li Orgoillous," against "une noble dame de Rome," the exceptionally virtuous Lucretia.⁹⁹ The characters of Cicero, Cato

⁹⁷ Chellini *Chronica* 146. The above-mentioned passage from the *Tresor* on the role of Mars in Florence's foundation is more directly related to *Inferno* XV.

⁹⁸ Chellini *Chronica*: "[L]eggendo *Li fet des Romains* I, 8, 1, Brunetto poté sapere della presunta complicità tra Cesare e Catilina e ciò lo portò forse a dubitare della ricostruzione storica offerta dalla *Chronica*" (146, n. 56).

⁹⁹ As is well known, the rape of Lucretia gave rise to a long-standing secular and theological tradition over the centuries. See for example Stephanie Jed *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

and Caesar come in at that point, to stress the differences in their moral attitude towards loyalty to the republican government:

Mes cele conjuroison fu discoverte au tens que li tres saiges Marcus Tullius Cicero, li miauz parlanz home dou monde et maistre de rethorique, fu consules de Rome, qui par son grant sens vainqui les conjurés, et en prist et fist destruire une grant partie par le consoil dou bon Caton qui les juga a mort, ja soit ce que Julius Cesar ne consoilla pas que il fussent jugiez a mort, mes fussent mis en diverses prisons. Et por ce distrent les plusors qu'il fu compains de cele conjuroison [...] (36.5-6)

In turn, chapter 38 ("Coment Jule Cesar fu premier empereor de Rome") describes Caesar's political ascent in the wake of the political turmoil caused by Catiline's conspiracy.

Paradoxically, "por ce que les romains ne povoient avoir roi," Caesar's military victories propelled him to proclaim himself "empereor," and then at his death the power passes to his nephew Octavianus Augustus, whose violence perpetuates that related in chapter 36. Thus, Brunetto emphasizes that the autocratic power of the emperors was doomed to emerge as a result of civil war. On the basis of his life's work to reinforce communal participation in city politics, Brunetto's insistence on acts of violence by a king resonates with the theme of the arbitrary nature of monarchic power, in contrast to the wisdom which drove Roman citizens to abolish monarchy and replace it with a republic:

Por cheste achoison fu cil Tarquinius chaciez de son regne et fu establi par les romains que jamas n'i eust rois, mes fust la citez governee et tout son regne par le senators, et par les consules et tribunes et dicteurs, et par autres offices selonc ce que les choses sont grant et dedenz la ville et dehors. (66)

This theme is already present in the communal and republican undertones discernible in the *Chronica's* representation of Caesar, opportunely curbed by the republican-oriented Senate.

Moreover, it is against the backdrop of discord between Caesar and the Senate that the *Chronica* emphasizes the genealogical myth of Florence as 'daughter' of Rome:¹⁰⁰ acting in opposition to Caesar's pretensions to build the city according to his own will, once again Florence's replication of Rome's urban structure is determined by the Senate. In contrast, by referring only in passing to the Roman role in Florence's foundation, by omitting Caesar's role and by deterministically emphasizing Mars as the source of its factionalism, Brunetto minimizes the filial relationship and focuses instead on astral and geographical elements as evidence of Florence's intrinsically bellicose nature. In Dante the commonplace of Florence as offspring of Rome is intertwined with the monarch's centrality and with the grafting of the tradition attributing the factionalism in Florence to the strife with Fiesole.

Clearly Brunetto's representation of Caesar is consistent with his overall project of historical refashioning, the driving force behind Dante's ironic criticism. Giuliano Tanturli argues that Brunetto represents Caesar as the anti-republican figure par excellence in the wake of the civil war resulting from Catiline's conspiracy, while portraying Cicero and Cato as model citizens working in the interests of their republic.¹⁰¹ By contrast, even though on an explicit level Dante shares Brunetto's silence on Caesar's role as founder of Florence, the complex and morally ambiguous

¹⁰⁰ This myth becomes such a commonplace in the chronicle tradition that, for example, it is even cited in Dino Compagni's introduction to his *Cronica*, which refers to Florence as "la nobile città figliuola di Roma" (I, 2).

¹⁰¹ Giuliano Tanturli, "Continuità dell'umanesimo civile da Brunetto Latini a Leonardo Bruni," *Gli umanesimi medievali. Atti del terzo congresso del Internationales Mittellateinerkomitee (Firenze, Certosa del Galluzzo, 11-15 settembre 1993)*, Ed. C. Leonardi, Firenze, 1998, 738 seqq. Although not formulated explicitly, this concept is also present in Holloway *Twice Told Tales* 179 seqq.

figure of Caesar primarily serves as prototype of the divinely ordained imperial role.¹⁰² This is why Dante the poet uses it in *Inferno* IV as an introductory bridge from the Florentine tradition back to its Roman roots.

Thus, neither the fact that it is not mentioned in *Li fet des Romains* nor his intellectual and political affinity with Cicero fully accounts for Brunetto's silence on Caesar as Florence's founder,¹⁰³ especially if the focus lies on the ways in which it fits into Dante's subsequent reelaboration. In fact, it ignores that, making no attempt to propose another individual responsible for the foundation,¹⁰⁴ Brunetto limits himself to a passing reference to the Romans ("les Romains") as the founders of Florence (37. 2). One might well ask how this choice reflects Brunetto's civic ideology, and how this in turn relates to Dante's engagement with his account.

Alongside his praise of Cicero and Cato as models for his fellow Florentine whom he strove to educate to civic life, Brunetto further emphasizes the communal and republican nature of Florence. While on the one hand Brunetto corroborates the *Chronica's* republican ideology,¹⁰⁵ on the other hand he implicitly rejects the *Chronica's* genealogy linking Fiesole to Troy, and in turn to Rome and Florence. For instance, the *Tresor* cites Fiesole only once and does so in relation to Catiline's conspiracy; Dardanus is neither son of Atlas and Electra nor the founder of Troy, but the son of Jupiter – whom Brunetto, with a typical euhemeristic and (pre)-humanistic stance, describes as a Greek king only later on 'divinized' – whose nephew "Tro[u]s" was to found Troy (I 32 I-II).¹⁰⁶ Brunetto's account erases Fiesole's genealogical relationship with Florence, alongside the conflictual relationship between the two cities which, according to the *Chronica*, eventually led to the emergence of communal Florence in the twelfth century as a regional political power over its historical rival in the countryside.

This tradition of conflict between neighboring cities, which according to the *Chronica* led to the mingling of the Florentine and Faesulan people, provides the the basis for Dante's account of Florentine factionalism, which culminates in the episode of Cacciaguida, developed in Chapter Four. Now, the fact that Brunetto studied in Fiesole, where his family had strong social and business roots in addition to those they had in Florence,¹⁰⁷ may lead us to wonder about his motivations for reshaping the Florentine foundation myth on the basis of sources which, unlike the *Chronica*, stood outside of the mainstream and then reshaping them according to his own ideological stances.

Julia Bolton Holloway presents a possible explanation in her historical contextualization of Brunetto's intellectual efforts, emphasizing that during the emigration of the "troublesome,

¹⁰² Pastore Stocchi emphasizes that classical and medieval appraisals on this matter oscillated from that of condemnation of Caesar's politica and moral conduct to a celebration of his deeds: "occorre però dire che il pieno apprezzamento della sua opera e l'ammirazione incondizionata dell'uomo caratterizzano soprattutto l'età umanistica [...] L'età antica e il Medioevo, per ragioni e in modi diversi [...] talvolta lo giudicarono senza simpatia in una prospettiva improntata a moralistica nostalgia repubblicana e allo strascico di orrore lasciato dalle guerre civili" ("Giulio Cesare," ED Vol. II, 222). Nevertheless, for Dante Caesar stood as "strumento della volontà divina, in una guerra che portava alla fondazione dell'impero romano" (223).

¹⁰³ Chellini *Chronica*: "Il silenzio di Brunetto sulla presunta fondazione di Firenze da parte di Giulio Cesare è probabilmente dovuto sia alla mancata menzione di essa ne *Li fet des Romains*, sia a questioni ideologiche" (146, n. 56).

¹⁰⁴ As, for example, other politically engaged Florentine humanists (Salutati, Bruni, Borghini among others) would actually do between the fifteenth- and sixteenth- century.

¹⁰⁵ Chellini *Chronica*, chapter 8 *passim*, the republican reaction against Caesar pretensions is clearly stated from l. 3 ("Senatoribus et consulibus Romanorum non permittentibus, statuerunt quod ...") onwards. The Roman republican institutions kept the same leading role in refounding Florence after Totila's destruction, as further emphasised in ch. 11 (from line 1: "Romani autem ceperunt cogitare qualiter Florentia rehedificaretur ...").

¹⁰⁶ According to Brunetto, Dardanus' only remarkable deed was his foundation of the Greek city of "Dardania." Incidentally, Brunetto is inconsistent here, because in ch. I, 28, 3 he had already said that Dardanus' brother "Danaus," Jupiter's only other son, "ot guerre contre Trouis roi de Troie et contre Ilum et [G]animedem son fis, et occist celui [G]animedem. Ceste [fu] la premiere heine des troians et des grezois." Thus we must assume that the Trojan War originated within three generations of the same family line.

¹⁰⁷ Marco Santagata *L'io e il mondo. Un'interpretazione di Dante*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011, 217-218.

quarrelsome, and frequently illiterate”¹⁰⁸ Ghibelline feudal landowners from the Fiesolan countryside to Florence during the *Primo Popolo* government:

Brunetto seemed to have chafed at the establishment of Fiesole and its Ghibelline flavor in his own quest for the simplicity of Cato, the severity of Cicero. He was to stress [...] in the section on the rhetoric in the *Tresor*, the need to civilize and educate such people.¹⁰⁹

Thus, Brunetto’s role as a civic master of native Florentines and new arrivals to the city would have made it problematic to insist on the strife between Florence and Fiesole. Whatever the reason, in addition to ignoring Fiesole’s strife with Florence, the *Tresor* does not offer an alternative account of Florence’s emergence as a commune, as the *Chronica* does. As a consequence, his ideological refashioning is further aggravated by the complete remotion of a well rooted collective identity which fostered Dante’s vital refashioning of such narratives.

Dante’s ideological response to Brunetto’s *Tresor* further reinforces my reading of *Inferno* IV, which develops the rhetorical and ideological allusions to the genealogy of Florence through the naming of the major players identified by the *Chronica*, culminating in Julius Caesar. In fact, in so doing the poet not only bridges the figure of Caesar from the *Commedia* to his own civic tradition, but he also implicitly counteracts Brunetto’s account in the *Tresor*, thus preparing the reader, who is expected to share his awareness of his city’s narrative, for the more explicit irony and criticism displayed in *Inferno* XV. As a consequence, this specific allusion to the *Chronica* allows Dante to ennoble the figure of Caesar in order to emphasize Florence’s illustrious Roman roots and transcend the negative anti-republican qualities attached to him in both the *Chronica* and Brunetto’s account.

Such an inversion of perspectives is reinforced by a detail in Chapter 36, where, after portraying Caesar’s position with regards to the conspirators, Brunetto substantiates his anti-republican portrait of Caesar by specifying that:

[...] et a la verité dire il n’ama onques li senators ne les autres officiaus de Rome, ne eaus lui; car li estoit estrait de la lignee Enee, et après ce estoit il de si haut coraige [que il ne baoit] fors qu’[a] la seignorie avoi[r] dou tout, selonc que ses ancestres avoient [eu].

In so doing, Brunetto uses the commonplace of the *gens Iulia* to which Caesar belonged (deriving from Iulus, the son of Aeneas) to explain Caesar’s ideological attitude in light of republican ideology, thus also casting a less favorable light on the *pietas* of Aeneas. The ‘imperial’ lesson that Dante learnt from Vergil’s major poem is particularly relevant here, and his Roman imperial mastery is opposed to the communal mastery of *ser Brunetto*. Interestingly, in fact, when Dante presents this genealogy, alluding to Caesar as a descendant of Aeneas in *Inferno* IV, Aeneas appears immediately before Caesar in the list of “spiriti magni” (122-123), further reinforcing the ideological resonances behind Brunetto’s and Dante’s widely divergent portrayals of Caesar.

The medieval Florentine collective memory tradition can be better understood through a close look at the shifting account of Florence’s foundation from the *Chronica* to the *Tresor* to the *Commedia*. In turn, a study of the public display of politically charged visual productions sheds new light on the literary tradition within its social and political context. Thus, Chapter Three deals with the ways in which visual and other kinds of representations that publicly display the early narratives so far delineated, spanning over a time period beginning before Dante and ending centuries after his writing of the *Commedia*.

¹⁰⁸ Holloway *Twice Told Tales* 181.

¹⁰⁹ Holloway *Twice Told Tales* 181.

Chapter Three

Connecting literary and visual representations of Florence's foundational mythologies

The agents responsible for the production of publicly displayed visual representations aim to legitimize their own perspective. Moreover, insofar as they construct collective memory, civically charged visual productions are in constant dialogue with rhetorically and ideologically charged texts. Building on the complex relationships between the *Chronica*, the *Tresor* and the *Commedia* developed in the previous chapter, this chapter sheds light on the *Commedia*'s engagement with the urban and political context of medieval Florence by discussing the integration of two well-known visual productions with this textually mediated tradition. The first is a statue, identified by Dante as representing Mars, which stood near the Arno River since early medieval times until it was washed away by a flood in 1333. The second is the *primo popolo* inscription publicly displayed on the Palazzo del Podestà in 1255. Dante reveals his familiarity with these constitutive elements of his civic environment in the *Commedia* both directly in the case of statue and indirectly in the case of the inscription.

Dante's "invention" of the statue of Mars as a representation of collective memory

The survival of a pagan simulacrum within Christian Florence is dealt with in the anonymous Florentine suicide's superstitious speech in *Inferno* XIII, 143-150.¹¹⁰ In fact, it is precisely the overlapping of ambivalent features that characterizes the statue of Mars in medieval Florence and its value as a symbol for its citizens: the simulacrum believed to display the pagan protector of the city also represented the embodiment of his astrologically destructive influence over the city.¹¹¹ A discussion of the statue's ambiguous symbolic meanings in relation to historical evidence regarding the statue sheds light on the mechanisms by which fiction engages with and transforms history. To begin with, what can be said with historical precision about the statue's role as a civic landmark?

In his attempt to determine the factual background, the historian Robert Davidsohn documents the existence of an early medieval sandstone statue near the Ponte Vecchio on the Arno River.¹¹² The statue fell into the river during a flood in 1178, and its remains – a horseman atop a column, visible from the waist down – was subsequently restored to the general area where it had previously stood. This mutilated statue was definitively carried away by another flood in 1333.¹¹³ However, because no archeological evidence of the statue remains, Davidsohn relies on Giovanni Villani's description, although cautioning readers about the chronicler's historical reliability.¹¹⁴ Davidsohn also relates the statue superstitiously charged meanings as reported in the commentaries

¹¹⁰ I have discussed this episode in Chapter Two as an ambivalent example provided by Dante of the construction of communal pride. This pride is founded on, and perpetuates, the morally and ideologically charged distortion of the early chronicles' construction of collective identity. In *Inferno* XIII, Dante connects this distortion to the self-destructive sin of suicide, which functions as its symbol.

¹¹¹ This ambivalence has been most clearly pointed out by Luca Gatti, "Il mito di Marte a Firenze e la pietra scema", *Rinascimento. Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*. Seconda Serie, vol. XXXV, 1995, 201-230.

¹¹² Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze, I. Le origini*. Trans. Giovanni Battista Klein. Sansoni: Firenze, 1956, 1113-1119.

¹¹³ Davidsohn *Storia* 1114.

¹¹⁴ Davidsohn *Storia*: "Il più celebre dei cronisti fiorentini ci narra queste favole, ma anch'egli, purtroppo, per ciò che si riferisce a quel remoto passato della sua patria, va annoverato tra i poeti ai quali è lecito offrirci i vaghi frutti della sua fantasia" (1115). Villani deals with the statue of Mars in Florence in the following passages of his *Cronica* (ed. Porta): II V 20-28; IV I 54-67; V XXXIII 6; VI XXXVIII 29-30, 48-53. I discuss Villani's influence in relation to Dante commentaries' tradition during the Trecento later in the chapter, in order to substantiate my hypothesis of an early distortion of Dante's attempt in forging a new collective memory in *Inferno* XIII.

on the *Commedia* by l'Ottimo, Benvenuto and Boccaccio.¹¹⁵ In turn, these commentators – along with many others during the Trecento – rely on *Inferno* XIII to substantiate both the folkloric myth that the statue represented Mars and the popular superstitions surrounding it.

In so doing, Davidsohn implies, but fails to specify, that *Inferno* XIII is the earliest text purporting that the statue represented Mars. Moreover, Davidsohn seconds the established critical assumption, founded on the earliest commentaries, that Dante's identification of the statue with Mars was rooted in an established local tradition. It is on this basis that the anonymous suicide's speech has come to be read as an instance of collective memory. While the anonymous suicide gives voice to certain collective beliefs transmitted by the chronicles, for example in the confusion between 'Attila' and 'Totila',¹¹⁶ such references should also be carefully evaluated on the basis of the documentary references provided by the chronicles or other sources, along with Dante's programmatic refashioning of Florence's mythologies. For examples, in the anonymous *Chronica* the newly-founded city's monuments are described in detail, but without mention of any statue of Mars.¹¹⁷ Careful interpretation of the sources enhances our understanding of Dante's allusions to the Florentine civic context.

It is significant in this regard that Davidsohn's painstaking search for references to the statue's presence before Dante's time did not yield any evidence that it represented the pagan god of war. In fact, the historian reports that a legal document dating back to 1078 curiously refers to a statue in that location merely as a "piramidem," a term which he convincingly associates with the statue of a horseman in the early medieval Italian context. Moreover, Davidsohn acknowledges that other reasonable historical facts contradict the statue's identification with Mars. Not only is there a lack of any iconographic tradition representing Mars on horseback since the Greek and Roman antiquity, but it have been unconventional to choose sandstone over marble or bronze, which were traditionally used in Italian representations of Roman gods.¹¹⁸

Davidsohn instead connects the identity of the statue to the well-documented early medieval representations of Ostrogothic kings (eminently, Theodoric) on horseback. In fact, he convincingly points out that a number of Italian cities, including Ravenna, Rome, Pavia, Verona and Naples, preserved evidence of this tradition during Dante's time.¹¹⁹ Thus, in the course of his wanderings throughout Northern Italy, Dante might have seen other representations of this kind, and realized that they fit into a traditional iconographic representation of Ostrogothic kings, rather than the god Mars. Although Dante's oeuvre provides no confirmation to this hypothesis, this possibility would further emphasize the misguidedness of the anonymous suicide's account, thus reinforcing the poet's already clear stand against his fellow citizens' false beliefs.

Other scholars have discussed the statue's identity. More recently and less persuasively than Davidsohn and those who have followed in his footsteps, Chellini attributes the identity of the statue to Saint Martin of Tours, on the basis of both other medieval visual representations and the

¹¹⁵ Davidsohn *Storia* 1115. L'Ottimo, Benvenuto, Boccaccio as well as other Trecento commentators of the *Commedia* are discussed later in the chapter.

¹¹⁶ As I have pointed out in Chapter Two, the recurrence of the barbarian king's name, twice as "Attila" in the *Commedia* and once as "Totila" in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, should be interpreted in the first case as a reference to the folkloric tradition, and in the second as more historically precise. This indicates Dante's awareness of the difference and his willingness to treat the same subject differently according to the context.

¹¹⁷ Chellini *Chronica* 8, 3-16.

¹¹⁸ Davidsohn *Storia* 1117-1118.

¹¹⁹ Davidsohn's theory has been acknowledged also by: Thomas Maissen, "Attila, Totila e Carlo Magno fra Dante, Villani, Boccaccio e Malispini. Per la genesi di due leggende erudite," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, CLII 1994 Disp.III, 561-639 (see 582-583), and Chiara Frugoni, "Il ruolo del battistero e di Marte a cavallo nella *Nuova Cronica* del Villani e nelle immagini del codice Chigiano L VIII 296 della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana," *MEFRM* 119.1, 2007, 57-92 (see 68-70). In particular, Frugoni adds detailed historical evidence to Davidsohn's information regarding the statues of Theodoric on horseback in Rome, Pavia and Ravenna, emphasizing in particular the similarities between the statue in Florence and the one in Ravenna.

hypothesis of confusion between the name of the pagan god and that of the Christian saint.¹²⁰ This hypothesis is weaker than Davidsohn's, not only because there is less evidence to support it, but also because it is unlikely that there would be a collective dis-remembering of the likeness of a Christian saint, ideologically and chronologically closer to communal Florence than a virtually unknown Ostrogothic king. Whomever the original statue actually represented, Chellini nevertheless reinforces Davidsohn's doubts about the Dantean identification of the statue with Mars, perceptively pointing out that "il cristianesimo trionfante avrebbe tolto di mezzo già nella tarda antichità la personificazione pagana della guerra" (176). In sum, it seems that the erosion of the collective memory surrounding the statue is the only certain historical fact about it.

Thus, it remains unknown whether and to what extent the anonymous suicide's myth derived from the Florentine folkloric tradition or from an obscure popular voice recovered and reshaped by Dante, or – given the lack of evidences on that matter before Dante – from the poet's imagination. Luca Gatti, author of the most recent and complete study on the history of the statue and the values it represented, offers an alternative to Davidsohn's reading. He points out the ambivalent role of Mars, who simultaneously represented protection over the city and a destructive menace against it.¹²¹ Gatti, whose sources are complementary to Davidsohn's, correctly notes that Brunetto's *Tresor* sets the stage for the subsequent development of the myth of Mars in Florence: "De ce doit maistre Brunet Latin savoir la verité, car il en est nés, et si estoit en exile lors k'il compli c'est livre per achoison de la guerre as florentins" (I, 37, 1-2).

Unfortunately, however, Gatti perpetuates the misconception that "questo mito si traduceva poi concretamente nella statua di Marte," and in so doing, he transposes Brunetto's account onto history, taking for granted that the statue represented Mars, without acknowledging that the earliest known text referring to the statue as Mars is *Inferno XIII*, and not the *Tresor* or any other civic chronicle before Dante. In this way, Gatti repeats Davidsohn's oversight. While Davidsohn's confusion is implicit, Gatti's is explicit and represents the culmination of a critical tradition which lacks supporting evidence.¹²²

Indeed, Gatti asserts explicitly that there was a tradition beyond Dante which attributed Florentine factionalism to Mars' influence over Florence as embodied in the statue.¹²³ He substantiates this point by citing the account of the murder of Buondelmonte provided in the chronicle of Pseudo-Brunetto, written between the end of the Duecento and the first decade of the Trecento:

la mattina della passqua di Risorexio, appiè di Marzo, in capo del Ponte Vecchio, messer Bondelmonte cavalcando a palafreno in gibba di sendado e in mantello con una ghirlanda in testa, messer Ischiatta delli Uberti li corse addosso e dielli d'una maçça in sulla testa. (Cited in Gatti, 204).

This is the earliest historiographic instance that identifies Buondelmonte's murder as the driving force behind Florentine factionalism. However, while it names the place identified by the Florentine suicide in *Inferno XIII* as the location of the statue of Mars "n sul passo d'Arno" (146), it clearly contains no references to any statue.

¹²⁰ Chellini *Chronica* 176.

¹²¹ Luca Gatti, "Il mito di Marte a Firenze e la pietra scema," *Rinascimento. Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*. Seconda Serie, vol. XXXV, 1995, 201-230.

¹²² Frugoni's case is striking because she takes for granted the existence of a folkloric tradition regarding the statue of Mars in Florence ("Il ruolo" 80, note 124). She cites I.37 of Brunetto's *Tresor* as evidence in support of the statue's existence. However, Brunetto's passage discusses Mars' influence over Florence, with no reference to any statue whatsoever.

¹²³ This confusion is also present in Davidsohn *Storia*, whose discussion of Dante's passage on the statue of Mars remarks that it was "messa in relazione con l'assassinio di Buondelmonte avvenuto la mattina di Pasqua del 1215, ha offerto larga materia alla fantasia dei poeti" (1115).

Thus, not only does Gatti project elements from Dante's poem onto preceding chronicles, but he also projects Giovanni Villani's subsequent interpretation, which is based on Dante's account, onto the earlier tradition. In fact, Villani cites the location of the murder identified in the Pseudo-Brunetto chronicle ("in capo del Ponte Vecchio"). He grafts it onto a context citing the statue mentioned in *Inferno* XIII when he recounts the Florentines' rebuilding of their city under Charlemagne after its destruction by Totila. Villani states that the citizens retrieved Mars' statue from the Arno and "la puosero in su uno piliere in su la riva del detto fiume, ov'è oggi il capo del ponte Vecchio" (IV I 59-61).¹²⁴ In other words, Villani's interpretation of Dante's cryptic verses (*Inferno* XIII, 143-145) and, in particular, the reference to the devastating destiny of Florence caused by its conversion to Christianity in defiance of the city's earlier protector, is the earliest known text which brings together the statue of Mars and the origin of Florentine factionalism. In this way, the deterministic view of Mars as master of the city propagated by Brunetto and parodied by Dante is transformed by Villani into historical fact, misleading subsequent readers up to the present day.

Much more in detail than Davidsohn, in fact, Gatti acknowledges that it is precisely on the basis of Dante's poem that later commentators (Jacopo e Pietro di Dante, l'Ottimo commento, Benvenuto da Imola, Boccaccio, Guido da Pisa), chroniclers (Giovanni Villani) and other writers (Antonio Pucci, Franco Sacchetti) build up a tradition on that statue "mantenendo sostanzialmente inalterata la connessione tra astro e divinità, ma arricchendolo di particolari importanti e accomodandone il significato alle diverse situazioni" (203). To the best of my knowledge, the origins of the link between Mars' ambiguous astral influence over Florence and the statue, which became part of the collective memory, can be traced exclusively to Dante's *Commedia* and to his refashioning of Brunetto's connection between Mars and Florence pointed out by Brunetto.

In sum, Gatti's reading of *Inferno* XIII perpetuates Davidsohn's underestimation of Dante's centrality in creating a new collective memory. Indeed, he asserts that Dante's vision overlaps with that of his anonymous character,¹²⁵ although the suicide's superstitious views are evidently at odds with Dante's Christian values. To substantiate his reading, Gatti interprets this episode in light of an ideological continuity between Brunetto and Dante. This interpretation conflicts with the solid evidence of Dante's ironic portrayal of his former master's moral distortion in *Inferno* XV. Even though the allusion to the supposed astrological influence of Mars in *Inferno* XIII signals continuity with Brunetto's account, this is not a sufficient reason to explain *per se* the complexity of the Dantean episode. Indeed, Gatti's generic explanation that "questo mito si traduceva poi concretamente nella statua di Marte" (204) is not corroborated by civic narratives preceding Dante's poem.

Thus, Gatti's reading of *Inferno* XIII on the basis of Brunetto's *Tresor*, that is, focusing on Mars as responsible for civic factionalism, obscures the verses' literal meaning: "I' fui della città che nel Batista / mutò 'l primo padrone; ond'ei per questo / sempre con l'arte sua la farà trista" (143-145). Indeed, the suicide claims that the city's former master, Mars has taken revenge over the city for choosing John the Baptist as its protector, he naively displays his own superstition. Furthermore, alongside the suicide anonymity as mirroring the superstition of the community he represents, Dante, by emphasizing the suicide's use of the word "padrone," alludes to the pagan deity as a hierarchical and repressive figure whose qualities differ sharply from the benign intercession of the saints according to Christian spirituality. In sum, this is a case in which the tropological sense overwhelms the literal one.

In so doing, Dante attains a double purpose. First, through the suicide's speech he alludes to Brunetto's pagan and deterministic superstition about Florence's destiny as it appears in the *Tresor*

¹²⁴ Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta, Parma: Guanda, 2007 (1st ed. 1990), 145.

¹²⁵ Strictly connecting Brunetto to Dante in continuity, Gatti "Il mitod i Marte" points out that "[d]i una «etimologia» infausta si lamenta anche Dante, che vede ragione di funesti presage nel fatto che la città aveva combiato l'antico patrono," (112) citing *Inferno* XIII 143-145.

setting the stage for his ironic treatment in *Inferno* XV. Second, he shows that in both cases, civic factionalism results from the moral distortion of collective memory. In fact, although civic factionalism resonates through both Brunetto's account and the suicide's speech, it is subordinated to the narration of personal beliefs and experiences. Indeed, in *Tresor* I, 37, 1-2, Brunetto brings as an example of Mars' influence his own exile alluding to the factionalism between Guelfs and Ghibellines. Along the same lines, in *Inferno* XIII the anonymous suicide cites a selection of collective memories which stage, and perhaps justify, his suicide as a *figura* for the severe risk of a collective self-destruction.

In fact, the verses that follow (ll. 146-151) emphasize the suicide's biased selection of civic collective memories, citing "Attila" (149) as the barbarian king who allegedly destroyed Florence and thus evoking the *Chronica's* episode of Totila (10.14-26).¹²⁶ Further corroborating my reading of this speech as ambivalent, Chellini remarks that the *Chronica* "non pare dell'idea che il dio e pianeta Marte tutelassero la Firenze antica, anche perché cita la divinità romano-italica soltanto per ricordarne la paternità di Romolo e Remo" (173). The suicide haphazardly pieces together disconnected fragments, such as Brunetto's representation of Mars and the *Chronica's* account of Totila's destruction of Florence.

In interpreting this tapestry of civic memories, I argue that Dante's complex use of Florentine mythologies in the episode of the Florentine suicide is aimed not only at responding to the *Tresor's* attempt at civic mythopoiesis (as seen in I, 37), but also to reframe the role of his city's collective memory. More precisely, Dante achieves his purpose by weaving together three concurrent narrative strands: a folkloric and pagan tradition about the statue, not documented by any previous written source known to modern scholars; Brunetto's reference to Mars – but, it should be emphasized, *not* to its statue – influence over Florence in connection with his own political experience which led him to exile; and a clear reference to the well-established *Chronica*, which was the main written historiographic source of early Florentine history for medieval Florentines, including Brunetto and Dante. Thus, Dante's purpose is to draw readers' attention to the ambiguous interweaving between deceptive and truthful uses of traditional narratives in building one's own identity as a citizen.

On the one hand, in fact, the encounter with the anonymous suicide triggers a sympathetic reaction both by the poet and the pilgrim, which is in fact caused by "la carità del natio loco," that is, by a collective sense of place, rather than the special story of a well-defined individual. On the other hand, the morally distorted misinterpretation of those narratives leads to a loss of identity culminating in the ultimate act of self-destruction: the suicide of a private citizen who represents the sinful behavior of his entire community, as many commentators since the Trecento (i.e., Benvenuto and Boccaccio) up to today (i.e., Spitzer)¹²⁷ have already observed, especially with reference to the final line of *Inferno* XIII, "Io fei gibetto a me de le mie case." Here Florence is the site in which individualistic choice ("Io ... a me ... le mie") is subsumed into a collective sphere. At the same

¹²⁶ As suggested in Chapter Two, the names of Attila and Totila were easily confused during medieval times, as happened with Dante himself, who takes advantage of this ambiguity to add rhetorical complexity with regard to his engagement with the narrative tradition. Chellini cites this reference as a source for Dante (171-179). However he, is uncharacteristically imprecise in this instance and misses the opportunity to lend further supported to his intertextual analysis. In fact, a very close connection exists between the *Chronica's* words and Dante's. Compare the *Chronica's* "ipse rex et sui milites" (10.23) after the slaughter of the Florentines "mictendo ignem in ipsa civitate, dextruxerunt eam, et pauca hedificia in ipsa remanserunt" (10.24-26), to the Dante's "sovra 'l cener che d'Attila rimase." Even more interestingly, in citing *Inferno* XIII, 148, Chellini's assertion that "l'idea che «que' cittadini che la rifondarno», calcolassero astronomicamente i giorni più adatti alla ricostruzione della città (*Chr.*, 11, 3-5)" is not justified in the Dantean text, because the suicide alludes neither to astronomy nor to astrology (two terms almost synonymous in the Middle Ages). This mistake, very similar to Gatti's, reveals the strong prejudice favoring an ideological continuity between Dante and Brunetto on the theme of Mars as the city's spiritual 'founder' persisting in today's critics.

¹²⁷ Leo Spitzer, *Studi Italiani*, ed. Claudio Scarpati, Vita e Pensiero: Milano 1976: "all'epoca della città medievale cinta da mura, *case* doveva inevitabilmente suggerire una 'casa in mezzo a case'; l'uso di questa parola colloca il suicida sullo sfondo della sua città, Firenze" (246).

time, the obscure memories linked to the ancient statue fuel the ideological purposes of Brunetto and Dante, the most influential creators of Florentine collective memory between the second half of the Duecento and the first decade of the Trecento.

Misled or misleading readers? The Trecento commentaries to *Inferno XIII*

A further discussion of the commentary tradition can contribute to the understanding of the interweaving of historical facts and literary fiction which occurs even in the case of a rigorous historian such as Davidsohn. Moreover, the commentaries help reconstruct Dante's original point of view by shedding light on the discrepancies between the historical facts which offered inspiration for the fictional work on the one hand, and on the other hand the interpretations of the relationship between such facts and fiction.

Though the evidence that Dante's *Commedia* is the earliest known text to suggest the identification of the statue with Mars, it should be first emphasized that the poet does not represent it as his own belief. Rather, in his rhetorical effort to exemplify his city's moral perversion, Dante displays the anonymous suicide's passive transmission of superstition. Along the same lines, numerous commentators ever since the Trecento have fallen into the Dantean 'trap' in remarking that, despite the lack of written sources, the poet draws from a collection of civic memories. A reconstruction of the commentary tradition up to and including Villani's *Cronica*, helps trace the history of its misreading. In fact, even though Giovanni Villani cannot technically be defined as a Dante commentator, his treatment of this matter sheds light on the commentators immediately preceding him.

To begin with, the commentator closest to Dante is the only one to elude this tradition of misreading. I am of course referring to Dante's son, Jacopo, who wrote the earliest commentary on the *Inferno* in the years immediately following Dante's death in 1321. In discussing *Inferno XIII* 146-150, Jacopo limits himself to a short literal explanation without alluding to any local folkloric tradition, but adds in passing that at some point in the past the statue was retrieved from the Arno River and placed in the spot where it remained in Jacopo's age.¹²⁸ Thus, it should be noted that even the earliest commentator, who benefited from personal knowledge about the poet and from first-hand contact with the statue, explains the statue on the basis of a distant and unclear historical fact rather than pointing out an easier connection between the suicide's speech and an allegedly established oral tradition.

Except for those who limit themselves to a literal explanation, as does Graziolo Bambaglioli (1324), early commentators after Jacopo Alighieri reveal the difficulty of elucidating the meaning of those lines, precisely because of the problems caused by the historically unclear basis for the construction of their reading. For example, Iacomo della Lana (1324-28) awkwardly explains the reference to Mars as the city's first patron (ll. 143-44) by remarking that "questo per allegoria vuol dire l'autore che Firenze triunfava per battaglie, e non metteva altro mezzo nelli suoi affari che farla con le mani," implying a positive view of Florence's bellicosity, in contrast with Brunetto's account of its patron's negative impact on the city before and after its conversion to Christianity:

Or qui per allegoria l'autor mostra la qualitate d'i Fiorentini dopo lo primo regimento, cioè da poi in li suoi affari fare altro che duello, e pone *per locum a simili* che sí come tra li altri discipuli e fedeli ch'ebbe lo nostro Signore, san Ioanni Battista fue salvatico ed estratto da

¹²⁸ "E finalmente approvandola, che s'e Fiorentini anticamente non l'avessero ricolto e in atti riposto, com'è al presente nella testa del loro vecchio ponte si vede, che indarno di dietro alla distruzione di Firenze che per Attila Unghero anticamente si fece per loro edificato, così si sarebbe, per lo qual significamento, secondo l'arte della stologia in alcun vero cotal principio per ascendente s'intende." In: www.dante.dartmouth.edu, *at locum*.

ogni conversazione e vita umana, così li Fiorentini sono astratti, diversi e selvatici e crudi a comparazione di tutti li altri umani atti.¹²⁹

The Bolognese commentator gave free rein to his bias against Florence, based his subjective and communal point of view, distinct from and unsympathetic to the Florentine tradition. As a result, it is no surprise that Iacomo either underestimates the impact of Brunetto's emphasis on the disasters perpetrated by Mars against Florence since its foundation by Rome, or describes John the Baptist sarcastically as a figure for the Florentines who have taken him as their protector.

Even more interesting for the distance it takes from the dominant tradition is Iacomo's 'allegorical' interpretation on lines 146-151, in which the Buondelmonti family is praised for following the positive influence of Mars, and thus preserving the city:

Or questa imagine hae per allegoria a significare li Buondelmonti, li quali sono gentili ed armigeri uomini, li quali hanno per lo seguir lo primo modo di Firenze, cioè di farla con mano, mantenuta la terra in la detta arte, ed oggi non disfatta.

Here Iacomo points out the Buondelmonti's warlike attitude to reinforce his praise of pagan Florence's practical values ("lo primo modo di Firenze"), alongside with his implicit praise for Buondelmonte, who was in spite of himself the most famous member of the family.¹³⁰ Anti-Florentine rhetoric aside, what matters here is that Iacomo's abrupt reference to Buondelmonte implicitly draws – but fails to develop – a connection between the narrative of Buondelmonte's murder, the statue of Mars and the Ponte Vecchio. In this way, he follows a pattern similar to that of the above-cited passage extrapolated from the chronicle of Pseudo-Brunetto.

However, such knowledge could have been elicited by *Inferno* XXVIII,¹³¹ and even more centrally by *Paradiso* XVI,¹³² where Dante makes explicit the connection between the murder, the Ponte Vecchio and the statue of Mars. Taking into account that it is decidedly unlikely that Villani's *Chronica* was already circulating when Iacomo was preparing his commentary,¹³³ this remark does not reveal the existence of a previous legend. On the contrary, it is an example of the commentators' general tendency to build further fictional narratives on Dantean references considered obscure, on the basis of the poet's *auctoritas* alone.

From this point of view, when dealing with the final verses of *Inferno* XIII, the commentaries produced during the 1330s (Guido da Pisa, Anonimo Selmiano, Ottimo) and 1340s (Pietro Alighieri, Andrea Lancia) are more concerned with Florence's superstitious and destructive

¹²⁹ Iacomo della Lana, *Commento alla 'Commedia,'* a cura di Mirko Volpi, con la collaborazione di Arianna Terzi. Tomo I. Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2009, p. 423.

¹³⁰ Buondelmonte's alleged role in the history of Florentine factionalism has already been discussed in Chapter Two. Before Dante (*Inferno* XXVIII 103-11 and *Paradiso* XVI 136-144) and Villani (VI XXXVIII), the earliest chronicle source relating this episode is that of Pseudo-Brunetto, in Schiaffini 1954, pp. 117-120. Francesco Bruni emphasizes Dante's influence on Villani with regard to the presentation of Florentine factionalism in *La città divisa. Le parti e li bene comune da Dante a Guicciardini*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003, pp. 100-114.

¹³¹ "E un ch'avea l'una e l'altra man mozza, / levando i moncherin per l'aura fosca, / sì che 'l sangue faceva la faccia sozza, / gridò: «Ricordera'ti anche del Mosca, / che disse, lasso!, "Capo ha cosa fatta", / che fu mal seme per la gente toska». / E io li aggiunsi: «E morte di tua schiatta»; / per ch'elli, accumulando duol con duolo, / sen gio come persona trista e matta." (*Inferno* XXVIII 103-111)

¹³² "O Buondelmonte, quanto mal fuggisti / le nozze sue per gli altrui conforti! / Molti sarebb'er lieti, che son tristi, / se Dio t'avesse conceduto ad Ema / la prima volta ch'a città venisti! / Ma conveniesi a quella pietra scema / che guarda 'l ponte, che Fiorenza fesse / vittima nella sua pace postrema" (*Paradiso* XVI 139-147).

¹³³ Louis Green remains a reliable source on the timeline for the compilation and diffusion of Villani's *Cronica*: see *Chronicle Into History*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp.164-169. "The text of Giovanni Villani's *Chronicle*, at least in the form it has survived, can be shown from internal evidence to have begun no earlier than the 1320s, and, if one accepts the argument of Ferdinando Neri, the early 1330s. The version we now have may even date from as late as the 1340s" (164). Because his account of the statue of Mars is the most complex and influential during the Trecento, I refer here to Villani, who is discussed more extensively later in the chapter.

relationship with Mars, rather than elaborating on the complex meanings of Dante's use of these narratives on the basis of a tension between individuality and collectivity. Thus these commentators either reinforced the 'astrological' and 'pagan' perspective developed in Brunetto's *Tresor* I, 37 (Guido da Pisa, Anonimo Selmiano, Pietro Alighieri), or responded to it by developing a divergent, Christian stand on the issue (Ottimo, Andrea Lancia),¹³⁴ as can be seen in the discussion that follows.

The commentators' responses to Brunetto's ideology emerges in details such as the Florentines' pagan superstition connecting the moving of the statue after the first flood to the misfortunes that befell the city, to the causes of its endemic factionalism and the passage from pagan to Christian city symbolized by the transformation of the old temple of Mars into the Baptistery. Of particular interest is the reading of *Inferno* XIII, 144-148 provided in the anonymous 1333 commentary known as *L'Ottimo Commento*, because of the commentator's claim to report Dante's perspective as gleaned from a personal conversation with the poet regarding these lines:

Come detto è nel cominciamento di questo libro, l'Autore poetando, sì come li altri poeti, alcuna volta pone storia, alcuna volta favola, alcuna volta una novella, alcuna volta una truffa, alcuna volta una oppinione, non perch'elli creda quella oppinione, ma poetandola, e ornandone sua materia. Elli fue di Firenze, e però qui recita una falsa oppinione, ch'ebbero li antichi di quella cittade, la quale io scrittore domandandonelle, udii così raccontare. Che li antichi ebbero oppinione, che la città di Firenze fosse fondata essendo ascendente Ariete, e Marte signore de l'ora; onde fue fatto padrone d'essa Marte, e al suo onore sotto certa costellazione fu fatta una statua di pietra in forma d'uno cavaliere a cavallo, a la quale rendeano certa reverenza e onore idolatrio.

Beyond the credibility of this assertion, which could possibly have a factual basis but may very well have been invented or manipulated in order to strengthen the commentator's authority, *L'Ottimo's* remark also provides insight into how the *Commedia's* references to Florentine narratives were interpreted during the Trecento. In fact, this commentary clearly distinguishes Dante's opinion from that of his characters, while at the same time assuming Dante's transmission of a folkloric tradition. This is precisely the reason why the commentator does not discuss Dante's rhetorical and ideological role in reshaping this myth in order to construct Florentine collective memory.

It is interesting in this regard that *L'Ottimo*, a commentator usually well-informed on Florentine matters, felt the need to lean on Dante's word rather than citing the statue's purported identification with Mars as a widespread and established folkloric belief within the Florentine tradition. This detail also goes in the direction of reading the episode of the anonymous Florentine suicide as a Dantean construction rather than a replication of a widespread popular belief. Moreover, referring to the Marte's narrative as a "falsa oppinione," *L'Ottimo* moves away from Brunetto's insistence on the astrological forces behind Mars' influence over the city in the *Tresor*.

Andrea Lancia's commentary closely replicates *L'Ottimo's* account of the statue of a horseman in honor of Mars, including the detail of Dante's personal role in propagating this

¹³⁴ On *Inferno* XIII, see: Guido da Pisa's comment on l. 145: "Quia Florentini claudicant in duas partes, secundum Elye sententiam, quia et beatum Iohannem in patronum assumunt et eum ut debent fideliter non honorant, et Martem totaliter non expellunt, ideo iusto Dei iudicio in manu primi patroni adhuc esse videntur." Anonimus Selmianus, on ll. 143-145: "Questa città si è Firenze, la quale quando si pose, sotto il padronaggio di Marte dio de le battaglie, e però dice *sempre con l'arte sua la farà trista*, cioè starà in battaglie, perchè il padrone in che è rimossa si è San Giovanni Batista." Pietro Alighieri, on ll. 139-151: "Faciendo loqui illum spiritum in cespite laceratum, dicendo quod est Florentinus: loquendo auctor hic a communiter accidentibus. Nam saepe accidit in illa civitate homines se ipsos suspendentes; et ratio, quia sub ascendente Martis constituta est Florentia, qui est planeta bellicosus et mortifer, conducens etiam ad tales desperationes." Citations are drawn from: www.dante.dartmouth.edu, *ad locum*.

narrative.¹³⁵ The originality of Lancia's commentary consists in his explanation of how the statue of Mars came from the temple to the shores of the Arno:

[143-150] → *Io fui della cittade che nel Batista mutò 'l primo patrone; ond'ei per questa* etc. Di questo paragrafo fue domandato Dante, però che pareva che tenesse vitio di resia. A ccìò rispuose così: la cittade di Firenze de prima coltivòe paganamente Marte, il cui ydolo fue fabricato uno cavaliere armato a cavallo. Poi quando la cittade lasciòe il paganesmo, il tempio di Marte consagròe sotto il nome di san Giovanni Batista e l'ydolo predetto levòe quindi e rizzollo in sul mezzo del Vecchio Ponte, non per ydolegiare, ma per mostrare che quello dio era sordo e mutolo e di nulla efficacia. (p. 269)

Quite interestingly, Lancia, a Florentine notary, distances himself from Brunetto's legacy in pointing out that the statue was placed near the Arno River not because of idolatry, but rather to prove that his influence ended after he was replaced by John the Baptist. In turn, it is well known that thanks to his personal friendship with Giovanni Villani, Lancia read the *Nuova Cronica* even before its publication, and thus the two shared a repertoire of narratives regarding their city.¹³⁶ In fact, Lancia and Villani's most important shared feature on this regard involves the distance they take from the astrological determinism used by Brunetto to link Mars to Florence's destiny. In Lancia's case, the distance is implicit, while in Villani it is explicit.

In fact, Villani's discussion of the city's mythological rebuilding after the destruction perpetrated by "Totile *Flagellum Dei*"¹³⁷ is followed by a reflection on the relevance of astrological influences on the city, and he concludes *dantescamente*, clearly alluding to Marco Lombardo's episode, that the sum of the constellations "nonn-è di nicessità, né può costringere il libero arbitrio degli uomini né 'l giudicio d'Iddio" (IV I 83-85). On this basis, Villani then explains the 'real' cause of Florentine factionalism:

Ma la nostra opinione è che lle discordie e mutazioni dei Fiorentini sieno come dicemmo al cominciamento di questo trattato: la nostra città fue popolata di due diversi popoli in ogni costume, siccome furono i nobili, e crudi, e aspri Romani e Fiesolani; per la qual cosa nonn-è maraviglia se la nostra città è sempre in guerra, e mutazioni, e disensioni, e disimulazioni. (IV I 91-98).

Villani justifies his polemical rewriting of Brunetto by constructing intertextual interplay between himself and Brunetto. In fact, the allusion to Brunetto's explanation of Florence's factionalism on the basis of Mars' astrological influence is clear even on a literal level.¹³⁸ At the same time, Villani's account is much more complex than Lancia's and the other previous commentators because it grafts the account of the temple of Mars and its transformation into a Christian church, with the statue's concomitant relocation, onto the context of Rome's foundation of Florence. In so doing, he follows the version of the facts narrated over a century before in the anonymous *Chronica*, in which Mars does not have the deeply negative astrological value attached to him by Brunetto.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Andrea Lancia, *Chiose alla 'Commedia'*, a cura di Luca Azzetta, Tomo I, 2012.

¹³⁶ Luca Azzetta, "Introduzione" in Andrea Lancia, *Chiose*: "[S]e la *Cronica* di Giovanni Villani è un testo assiduamente compulsato e spesso citato letteralmente dal Lancia, vero è che le chiose non sopravanzavano mai il libro IX ... Tale silenzio risulta più significativo se si considera che il Lancia poté accedere alla *Cronica* prima che essa fosse edita grazie al rapporto di amicizia con il cronista fiorentino" (18-19).

¹³⁷ Villani *Nuova Cronica* 141 (vol. 1, III XXI 2). I have already pointed out that the common medieval confusion between Attila and Totila. Villani is no exception.

¹³⁸ Latini *Tresor*: "Por ce ne n'est il mie mervoille se les florentins sont tozjors en guerre et descordes, car cele planete [i.e., Mars] regne sor els" (I, 37, 3).

¹³⁹ Villani's reliance on the *Chronica* is unmistakable and at times almost literal: "Dapoi che Cesere, e Pompeo, e Macrino, e Albino, e Marzio precipi de' Romani edificatori della nuova città di Firenze si tornarono a Roma, compiuti

Thus, Villani weaves together the traditional account found in the *Chronica* with his own myth regarding the construction of the temple of Mars, explaining it as an act of thanksgiving for Florence's victory against Fiesole:

I cittadini di quella [i.e., Firenze], essendo in buono stato, ordinario di fare nella detta cittade un tempio maraviglioso all'onore dello Iddio Marte, per la vittoria che' Romani aviano avuta della città di Fiesole, e mandaro al senato di Roma che mandasse loro gli migliori e più sottili maestri che fossono in Roma, e così fu fatto. E feciono venire marmi bianchi e neri, e colonne di più parti di lungi per mare, e poi per Arno. (II VI 9-17)

In order to substantiate his account, Villani adds a realistic touch to the temple's description, alluding to marble colors that could (and still can) be seen in Florence's Baptistery. Moreover, although it is clearly Dante's mediation that catalyzes Villani's recovery of Florentine history as narrated in the *Chronica*,¹⁴⁰ Villani strays quite far from the *Commedia* in the passage cited above. Indeed, Villani's representation of the Romans' peaceful coexistence with the surviving Faesulans stands as clearly in contrast with that implicitly sated in *Inferno* XV in Brunetto's speech, and then explicitly in *Paradiso* XVI. Villani goes so far as to describe the new city as united in its celebration of Mars. In so doing, he is evidently eager to represent a *civitas* whose former factionalism is at his times resolved by the power of the Black Guelfs, emphasizing that Florence prospered under their power.¹⁴¹

Alongside the detail of the marbles' colors, Villani dwells on other 'realistic' features of the Baptistery even in narrating its transformation from a temple of Mars to a Christian edifice:

Molto nobile e bello il feciono a otto facce, e quello fatto con grande diligenza, il consecraro allo Iddio Marti, il quale era Idio di Romani, e feciollo figurare inn-intaglio di marmo in forma d'uno cavaliere armato a cavallo; il puosono sopra una colonna di marmo in mezzo a quello tempio, e quello tennero con grande reverenzia e adoraro per loro Idio mentre che fu il paganesimo in Firenze. (II VI 20-28)

On the one hand, the realistic description of the temple's eight sides enhanced the average reader's perception of plausibility. On the other hand, from the point of view of erudite readers familiar with the symbolic and eschatological meanings of the number eight, the number of sides which a medieval baptistery traditionally had, this detail clashes strongly with the impression of plausibility and emphasizes Villani's fictional endeavor.

In his effort to counterbalance the abundance of unproved facts, Villani contextualizes the relocation of the statue of Mars within the historical summary of Florence's conversion to Christianity. In so doing, he emphasizes the Florentines' superstition and their reluctance to abandon their previous religious traditions:

[E] del bello e nobile tempio de' Fiorentini, ond'è fatta menzione adietro, i Fiorentini levaro il loro idolo, il quale appellavano lo Idio Marti, e puosollo in su un'alta torre presso al fiume

i loro lavori, la città cominciò a crescere e moltiplicare di Romani e Fiesolani insieme, che rimasono a l'abitazione di quella; e in poco tempo si fece buona città secondo il tempo d'allora, che gl'imperadori e 'l senato di Roma l'avanzavano a lloro podere, quasi come un'altra piccola Roma" (II V 1-9). See also Chellini *Chronica* 23-26.

¹⁴⁰ Chellini *Chronica*: "[f]u Dante a rivalutare la *Chronica* in poesia, creando i presupposti per la sua riabilitazione storiografica operata da Giovanni Villani" (149), and Bruni *La città divisa*: "avanzerei la proposta che la storia villaniana di Firenze è, ogni volta che sia possibile, tributaria della *Commedia*, benché Villani offra la più compiuta e organica esposizione del punto di vista della classe dirigente, in senso economico e politico, dei guelfi neri" (101), between others.

¹⁴¹ Frugoni "Il ruolo" 76 insist on the "Christian" political reasons to react against the statue of Mars in Villani's *Cronica*, with regard to the support offered by pope Boniface VIII to the Black Guelfs (76).

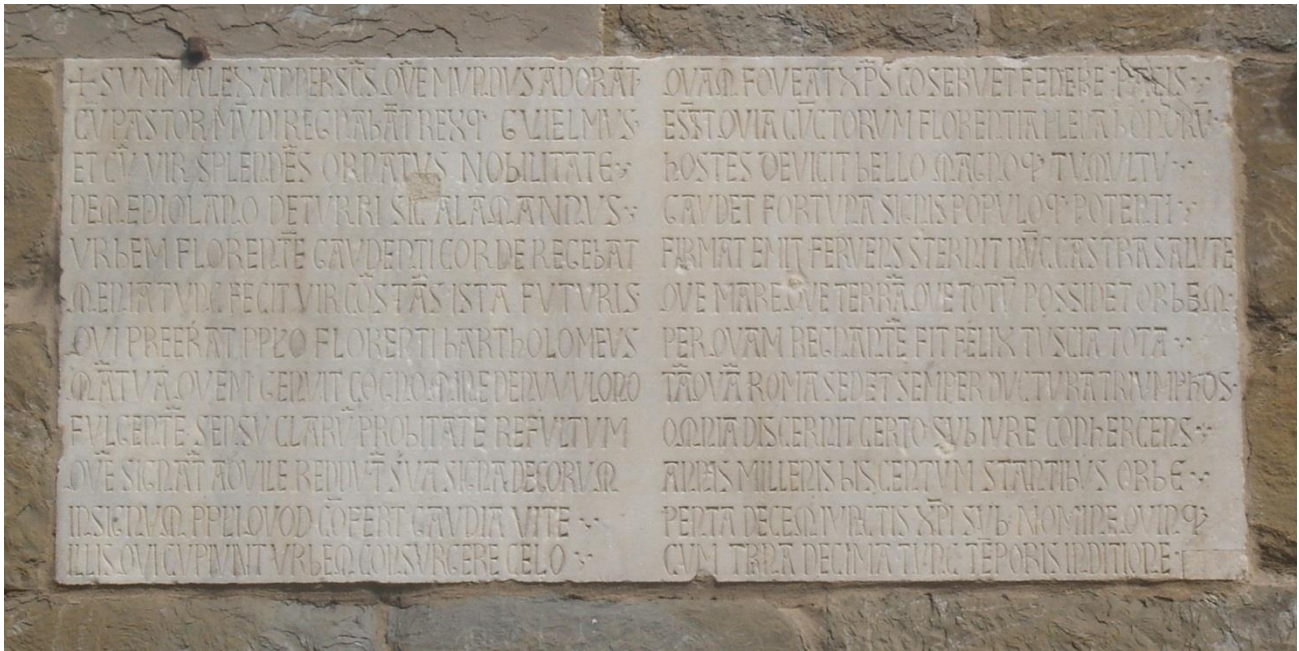
d'Arno, e nol vollono rompere né spezzare, però ché per loro antiche memorie trovavano che il detto idolo di Marti era consecrato sotto ascendente di tale pianeta, che come fosse rotto e commosso in vile luogo, la città avrebbe pericolo e danno, e grande mutazione. E con tutto che i Fiorentini di nuovo fossono divenuti Cristiani, ancora teneano molti costumi del paganesimo, e tennero gran tempo, e temeano forte il loro antico idolo di Marti; sì erano ancora poco perfetti nella santa fede. E ciò fatto, il detto loro tempio consecrato all'onore d'Iddio e del beato Santo Giovanni Battista, e chiamarlo Duomo di Santo Giovanni (II XXIII 9-25)

Once again, even in this passage Villani's judgment regarding his fellow citizens' false beliefs also implicitly criticizes Brunetto's *Tresor*. The various ways in which Villani represent the statue of Mars represent, along with the commentators to the *Commedia*, another instance of the acknowledgment, during the Trecento, of the existence of a relationship between Brunetto's attempt to build a lay and commune-centered collective memory and Dante's reaction to his 'master' efforts on this regard.

In sum, the lack of evidence before Dante regarding either a superstitious Florentine reverence of the pagan statue or, even more generally, any connection it may have had with Mars, cautions modern readers against assuming that the suicide's speech reflects historical truth. Additionally, it should be read as a key moment in Florentine myth-making arising from reading Dante during the Trecento. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility of a pre-Dantean folkloric tradition connecting the statue to Mars. Rather, it is entirely plausible that the early commentators' awkward references to a pagan tradition surviving in Florence despite centuries of Christianity are motivated by desire to substantiate Dante's poetic authority, with the political and civic values that it entails, and thus in turn criticizing Brunetto's views. In other words, their earnestness to grant the *Commedia* full credibility as a historical source obscures Dante's control over the materials he incorporates into his poem. A richer reading of the canto emerges by considering Dante's attempt to establish a complex set of connections between Brunetto's account of Mars' influence over Florence, Florentine collective memory as represented in communal texts, and his own ideological and rhetorical role in creating a new tradition.

Dante and the *primo popolo* government: the inscription on the Palazzo del Podestà

The complex interplay between Dante and Brunetto's views resurfaces in Dante's engagement with an inscription in Latin hexameters, firmly rooted in Brunetto's political context, and which is still readable today on the wall of the Palazzo del Podestà, in Florence. In sharp contrast with the obscure references to the statue, the inscription provides clear material evidence of the *primo popolo*'s political and ideological attempts to shape collective identity and memory:



Left column:

†SVMMALEXANDER S(an)C(tu)S QVE(m) MVNDVS ADORAT,
 CV(m) PASTOR MV(n)DI REGNABA(n)T REXQ(ue) GVIELMVS,
 ET CV(m) VIR SPLENDE(n)S ORNATUS NOBILITATE;
 DE MEDIOLANO DETVRRI SIC ALAMANUS;
 VRBEM FLORENTE(m) GAVDENTI CORDE REGEBAT
 MENIA TVNC FECIT VIR CO(n)STA(n)S ISTA FVTVRIS.
 QVI PREERAT P(o)P(u)PULO FLORENTI BARTHOLOMEVS
 MA(n)TVA QVEM GENUIT COGNOMINE DENVVVLONO
 FVLGENTE(m) SENSV CLARV(m) PROBITATE REFULTUM
 QVE(m) SIGNA(n)T AQVILE REDDV(n)T SVA SIGNA DECORVM
 INSIGNVM P(o)P(u)LI QVOD CO(n)FERT GAVDIA VITE;
 ILLIS QVI CVPIVNT VRBEM CONSVRGERE CELO;

Right column, continued:

QVAM FOVEAT CHR(istu)S CO(n)SERVERET FEDERE PACIS;
 EST QVIA CV(n)CTORVM FLORENTIA PLENA BONORV(m).
 HOSTES DEVICIT BELLO MAGNOQ(ue) TVMVLTV;
 GAVDET FORTVNA SIGNIS POPVLOQ(ue) POTENTI;
 FIRMAT EMIT FERVENS STERNIT NV(n)C CASTRA SALVTE
 QVE MARE QVE TERRA(m) QVE TOTV(m) POSSIDET ORBEM.
 PER QVAM REGNANTEM(m) FIT FELIX TVSCIA TOTA;
 TA(m)QVA(m) ROMA SEDET SEMPER DVCTURA TRIVMPHOS
 OMNIA DISCERNIT CERTO SVB IVRE CONHERCENS;
 ANNIS MILLENIS BIS CENTVM STANTIBVS ORBE;
 PENTA DECEM IVNCTIS CHR(ist)I SVB NOMINE QVINQ(ue)
 CVM TRINA DECIMA TVNC TEMPORIS INDITIONE.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The inscription has been transcribed both by Richard Mac Cracken, *The Dedication Inscription of the Palazzo del Podestà in Florence*, Florence: Olschki, 2001, 5, and by Julia Bolton Holloway, "Brunetto Latino maestro di Dante Alighieri," 2013, in her website www.florin.ms. Mac Cracken's transcription more consistently accounts for

During the thirteenth century, the Palazzo del Podestà housed the Capitano del Popolo, the civic figure most representative of the *primo popolo* government: “a non-Florentine appointed for one year with the responsibility of sounding the bell and summoning the neighborhood militia when necessary.”¹⁴³ The inscription names as the current Capitano Bartholomeus Nuvoloni in lines 7-8 of the left column, and verses 9-11 describe him in glowing terms.

The Capitano’s role overlapped with and took over some roles previously held by the *podestà*, but did not replace him, as the inscription makes clear. In fact, the inscription also praises the *podestà*, the Milanese nobleman Alamannus della Torre, just before citing the Capitano del Popolo. These two figures are implicitly compared for their complementary virtues: Alamannus’ more traditional ‘nobility’ (NOBILITATE, left, l. 3) and Bartholomeus’ ‘honesty’ (PROBITATE, left, l. 9), better suited to the mercantile and communal context. Both figures serve as a starting point for the *laudatio civitatis* developed throughout the inscription’s right column. The final lines clearly identify the year 1255, right in the middle of the decade of the *primo popolo*’s tenure.

Thus, the inscription celebrates the political, social and economic achievements of the *primo popolo* government which, proudly based on citizens belonging to the major guilds, did not initially align itself with either the Guelf or the Ghibelline faction within Florence.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, historians substantially agree that the first half of that decade represented one of the highlights of Florence’s popular government. In 1252, the minting of the golden florin dramatically reinforced Florence’s economic supremacy over other Italian communes. In 1254, Florence affirmed its hegemony over Tuscany, demonstrating the *popolo*’s ability to overcome the challenges posed by other smaller communes – many of which were Ghibelline, most notably Pisa, Siena, and Pistoia – eager to overturn its political control over the region.

Despite the *popolo*’s efforts to maintain political independence, the inscription provides clues of the Guelf attempt to regain control over Florence. First, the concurrent presence of the Capitano del Popolo and the *podestà* is in continuity with the previous Guelf government. More importantly, the inscription’s incipit invokes both pope Alexander IV (1254-1261), who distinguished himself in his political opposition to the Hohenstaufen dynasty, and William of Holland, appointed by the pope to serve as *rex romanorum* from 1254 to 1256 to contrast Manfred, the last heir of the Hohenstaufen in Italy.¹⁴⁵ In fact, in the second half of the decade, in order to withstand the overwhelming Ghibelline forces of rival Tuscan cities, the *primo popolo* government was progressively constrained to align itself with the Guelf party and, by extension, with the papacy.¹⁴⁶ As a result, the initial goal of maintaining neutrality in the conflict between imperial and papal factions gave way to the Guelf triumph in 1260, overturned that same year in the famous Battle of Montaperti, which resulted in the Ghibellines’ return to Florence.

It was into this ever-shifting political context that Dante was born in late May or early June of 1265. Then, just a year after Dante’s birth, the defeat of the imperial troops and the death of king Manfred in the battle of Benevento tipped the scales once again in favor of the Guelfs, restoring the previous civic government with Charles of Anjou as *podestà* with full powers for the next seven years. What does Dante have to do with this inscription, beyond the fact that it belonged to his civic *milieu*? Insofar as it showcased the apex of the *primo popolo*’s success, the inscription’s blend of history and fiction appealed to Dante’s own refashioning of his city’s history and identity. In fact,

punctuation and abbreviations, and for this reason I reproduce it here. Moreover, Mac Cracken provides a complete translation which is often interpretive rather than literal (6-8). I provide my own literal translation of the passages discussed in relation to Dante’s *Commedia*.

¹⁴³ Najemy *History* 67.

¹⁴⁴ Najemy *History* 66-72. More precisely, Najemy points out the popular government’s neutrality towards the factions: “Yet the chief sense in which the government of 1250-60 was “popular” rests in the exclusion of much of the ruling class of the preceding period and the limited role of known Guelfs and Ghibellines ... the popolo tried to steer a middle course between the parties and to present itself as a dominant third force capable of limiting their influence.” (68)

¹⁴⁵ Mac Cracken *The Dedication* 6.

¹⁴⁶ Najemy *History* 67.

Dante's precise literal reference to the inscription serves as a springboard for engaging critically with the political context of his age.¹⁴⁷ Offering an often dramatic, but always dynamic and creative interplay between identity and narrative, Dante's historical references aimed to build a new collective memory. However, they have been misread over the centuries as historiography, as illustrated by the example of the statue of Mars.

Moreover, considerations regarding the inscription's authorship may have influenced Dante's engagement with it. While the inscription is anonymous, the pre-humanistic quality of its Latin verses and its artfully passionate interweaving of politics and history have led to speculate on the author's identity. In particular, narrowing down the pool to politically active Florentine citizens who possessed the notarial skills necessary for drafting such verses, and complementing his hypothesis with a detailed paleographic research, Richard Mac Cracken persuasively argues that the author was Brunetto Latini.¹⁴⁸ In so doing, Mac Cracken offers insights into the role of this erudite text in constructing Florentine civic identity, as well as the implications of this purported authorship for Dante. Whether it was indeed Brunetto or a different Florentine closely associated with the *primo popolo*, and regardless of whether Dante knew the author's identity, there is no doubt that the inscription arose from Brunetto's ideological *milieu* and that Dante dealt with it as such.

Highlighting the discontinuity between this public example of the production of collective identity and the chronicle tradition, the passage in the *Commedia* explicitly citing this inscription contains neither allusions to the chronicles nor prophetic references to the poet's life, in contrast with the pattern discussed in Chapter Two:

Godi Fiorenza, poi che se' sì grande
che per mare e per terra batti l'ali,
e per lo 'nferno tuo nome si spande!
Tra li ladron trovai cinque cotali
tuoi cittadini onde mi ven vergogna,
e tu in grande orranza non ne sali.
Ma se presso al mattin del ver si sogna,
tu sentirai, di qua da picciol tempo,
di quel che Prato, non ch'altri, t'agogna.
E se già fosse, non saria per tempo.
Così foss' ei, da che pur esser dee !
ché più mi graverà, com' più m'attempo. (*Inferno* XXVI, 1-12)

Instead of a *post-factum* prophecy about himself, Dante inserts a cryptic prophecy regarding Florence's destiny in the Tuscan context (7-9). Furthermore, instead of a direct allusion to the chronicle tradition, these verses allude to a parallel attempt at constructing collective identity, ideologically associated with the *primo popolo*, with which Brunetto was intimately connected, whether or not he personally penned the Latin hexameters. Because the connection between the satire towards the *primo popolo*'s inscription and the irony towards Brunetto which already

¹⁴⁷ It seems that the earliest commentator to remark upon this connection was Alessandro Chiappelli, who published an article to this effect in the November 1930 issue of *Il Marzocco* (cited in Bosco-Reggio, *Inferno*, 413). See also Antonino Pagliaro *Commento* 535.

¹⁴⁸ Mac Cracken *Dedication*, *passim*. His argument has elicited three distinct reactions in scholars: agreement without reservation, as in Holloway's "Brunetto Latino maestro di Dante Alighieri", *passim*; acceptance of Mac Cracken's hypothesis as plausible, as in John Najemy's *History of Florence, 1200-1275*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, p. 64 n. 4; outright rejection, as in Davide Cappi's "Dino Compagni tra Cicerone e Corso Donati: i pericoli della parola politica," *Studi medievali* L.II (2009). None of these scholars provides detailed evidence for their respective conclusions. For instance, Cappi hastily dismisses Mac Cracken's hypothesis on the basis that it "riposa su generiche consonanze ideologiche e inconsistenti analogie paleografiche" (691, n. 42). Even though Mac Cracken's paleographic evidence is indirect and his methodology unorthodox, I am compelled by Mac Cracken's comparison between what remains of Brunetto's hand-written work still in existence and the public inscriptions produced in Florence during his time.

pervades canto XV extends to this passage, forming an interpretive bridge with the Ulysses episode, these elements are central to an understanding of *Inferno* XXVI's engagement with the inscription.

Furthermore, the prophecy regarding Florence and the reference to a Florentine political landmark overlap with an invective against the city. Indeed, it has been widely noted that Dante often chooses invective when expressing ambiguity towards Florence, most notably in *Inferno* XVI 73-75, *Purgatorio* VI 127-151, XXIII 97-114, and XXIV 79-81. The raging invective which opens *Inferno* XXVI serves the additional purpose of closing the episode of the five Florentine thieves, paralleling Vanni Fucci's invective against Pistoia in the previous canto (*Inferno* XXV 10-15). At the same time, it also introduces the theme of the distortion of civic and moral values so closely interwoven with the canto of Ulysses. Although a bitter and sarcastic tone is common to the invectives in *Inferno*, this one stands out for a number of reasons. First, it is pivotally located, joining two distinct episodes from two distinct cantos. Second, in comparison to the other invectives against Florence in the *Commedia*, it is unique in its function as an incipit of a canto. Third, it stands out for the violent abruptness of the first three verses, simultaneously eliciting prophetic awe and disorientation in the reader.

A long scholarly tradition has recognized the canto of Ulysses as structurally pivotal to an understanding of the *Commedia*, assuming his presence to be actively at stake throughout the poem.¹⁴⁹ On the basis of Dante's presentation of Ulysses, scholars have interpreted this exceptional character according to various typological senses, as standing in for Aeneas, Cato, Adam, Dante himself, and others, discussing his value in turn as either a courageous, albeit damned, figure, or, more often, a morally perverted one. Other structural *vexatae questiones* which have attracted the attention of readers dealing with the canto include whether and in what sense there might be a link between Ulysses' "orazione picciola" and the sin which condemned him to that *bolgia*. Additionally, scholars have raised the issue of the intertextual role of the classical and vernacular literary traditions in shaping Dante's moral representation of Ulysses.¹⁵⁰ Instead, what has been largely glossed over in the previous readings of the canto is the network of meanings created by such a striking opening invective against Florence within the canto of Ulysses and in the poem as a whole. Why did Dante choose to insert such an arch-invective against Florence, rhetorically projected onto a universal horizon by means of a prophetic voice, between the Florentine thieves and the episode of Ulysses?

Thus, this invective's structural features strongly reflect its pivotal role, as if it subsuming all the disappointment about the Florentine civic environment at stake in the poem. The narratorial voice recovered later on ("mi ven vergogna," v.5) expresses shame, reflecting on the fictional representation of a retrospective literary self. At first glance and from a rhetorical point of view, this shame seems intended to elicit the greatness of a prophet-like figure uttering the first three verses of condemnation, both in this world and in the next. But a more careful reading reveals the other side of such a prophetic figure. Indeed, on the one hand, the narrator's confessional tone conveys a sense of intimacy when he shares his shame with readers. On the other hand, the text reveals that such a redolent tone is interwoven with the fictional experience of the pilgrim who has met five damned fellow citizens in the bulge of the thieves ("tra i ladron trovai..." v.4) and has described them in terms of friendship and deference.

Thus, my reading focuses on two closely interconnected issues at stake here. First, the tension between the narrator and pilgrim who both animate the poem is transcended only when civic history appears on the scene. Second, the *Commedia* treats the connection between such a resolved tension and the representation of civic history in which Florence as a 'quasi-personaggio' with a major economic and political role on the Italian and European scene during Dante's age. The

¹⁴⁹ See for example Teodolinda Barolini "Dante's Ulysses. Narrative and Transgression," in Amilcare Iannucci, ed, *Dante, Contemporary Perspectives*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, 113-132.

¹⁵⁰ Guglielmo Gorni offers a synthesis and rich bibliography on this issue in *Dante. Storia di un visionario*, Bari: Laterza, 2008, 231-242.

depth and complexity of meanings resulting from the tensions at stake involve the creation of a new literary persona built upon the civic identity of the historical Dante and the narratives that were produced by that very civic context in order to create a new collective memory.

To describe the invective more precisely, the figures of poet and pilgrim converge, as reinforced once again by the narrator, who raises his sorrowful prophetic voice first against the city itself, through an allusion to a micro-historical reference still today unresolved by commentators for its obscurity (vv. 7-9), then linking them with his personal, outrageous experience of exile (vv. 11-12). Such a concern is eventually subsumed by the fatalistic tone which closes the invective (v. 12) with an explicit struggle between the pilgrim and the poet's points of view. Indeed, the two divergent interpretations of this passage over the centuries is symptomatic of a partial reading of an ambivalent passage which encompasses two opposing emotional responses to Florence: the poet's rage and the pilgrim's reverence.¹⁵¹

Then, the narration of the journey abruptly resumes ("Noi ci partimmo..." [v. 13]). While that "noi" obviously refers to the characters of Dante and Virgil as pilgrims within the poem, this narrative fracture also reveals that the two Dantean figures remain divergent. Precisely at the point when the poet momentarily sets prophecy aside, the pilgrim and his guide prepare to resume their journey. Such a separation is further substantiated by the ambiguous meaning of the verb "partire," which means both 'to depart' and 'to separate,' and in this second case it also alludes to the famous characterization of Florence as "la città partita," implicitly recalling *Inferno* VI 60. A few verses below, as if the centrality of this conflicted interplay were not already clear enough, especially if contrasted with the abrupt return to the journey's narration, both the Dantean figures regain their complex unity: in fact, as the narrator leans on the fictional memory ("mente") of the journey, performed by his rhetorical double, he persists in declaring his bitterness, according to the same sorrowful tone which pervades the preceding invective ("Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio / quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch'io vidi..." , vv.19-24).

The literary *personae* of the poet and the pilgrim converge in the moment when the poem deals with the evil deeds of historical Florence. In other words, the 'quasi-personaggio' of the city represents here the catalyst responsible for joining the fictional construction – namely the pilgrim – with its historic construction – namely the poet-narrator. Beyond that rhetorically constructed dichotomy, it seems that an additional fictional persona is at stake here, as if a third Dantean figure, that is, a historical one, whom I will call 'Dante the man,' overlaps with and subsumes the other two fictional constructions of the self, and points toward the direction of the bitterly real experiences the historical Dante Alighieri was doomed to cope with in his tormented life.

In sum, my interpretation of this passage must take into consideration several major elements. The first is the self-presentation of the arch-Dantean character. Emerging from the first, the second involves how this character deals with the self-presentation of Florence, the other arch-character at stake. In turn, alongside the negative moral connotations attached to Florence is a reflection on various historical eras, from the city's mythical foundation up to Dante's times. Thus, an inquiry on the historical roots of the poetic invective sheds new light on how these elements fit together.

A close reading of the circumscribed but pivotal perspective of *Inferno* XXVI leads to a deeper understanding of the poet's complex ideological and rhetorical strategies for dealing with Florentine civic themes. To this end, I reread the above-cited verses taking into account the mutually reinforcing dynamic between the Florentine urban context and the myth of Florence's earthly greatness, which shaped individual identity through the construction of collective memory. It is precisely this myth which the historically grounded yet powerfully prophetic Dantean figure so

¹⁵¹ The interpretative tradition on vv. 10-12 in this regard has been subject to a continuum of interpretations with two distinct poles. The first is aptly voiced by Antonino Pagliaro *Commento*: "[q]uello che risulta da questa triste e commossa dichiarazione è la profondità degli affetti che legano D. alla città natia, anche se egli sul piano etico-politico severamente la condanna" (536) and the second is expressed by those, especially the earliest commentators, who have focused upon Dante's desire to avenge himself against Florence.

violently rebukes in the beginning verses of *Inferno* XXVI. The centrality of these civic values is directly mirrored in their highly visible presence within the urban environment.

The specific words taken up by Dante appear on the sixth line of the right column, where Florence is explicitly named as the city “QVE MARE QVE TERRA(m) QVE TOTV(m) POSSIDET ORBEM,” that is, “which possesses the sea, the land, [and] the whole territory.”¹⁵² It is particularly remarkable from the point of view of the construction of collective memory that Dante modeled his anti-Florentine sarcasm on a verse which publicly exalted the city’s hegemony. Even more remarkable is the neglect in Dante criticism of the implications of the poetic choice reflected in these lines, especially considering that they appear at the beginning of a canto whose classical and romance sources have already received such abundant critical attention, albeit one that tends to underestimate the impact of the Florentine environment.

Other references to the inscription throughout the *Commedia*

Scholars focusing on Dante’s allusion to these verses as an archaeological curiosity underestimate the range of possible influences that the inscription might have exerted upon Dante. To begin with, the subsequent hexameter reads: “PER QUAM REGNANTE(m) FIT FELIX TUSCIA TOTA” [by whose rule all of Tuscany is made bountiful]. Having virtually gained possession of “the whole territory,” Florence rules over the specific geographical area identified as “TUSCIA.” Furthermore, the inscription goes on to present Florence as a model city that continues to transmit the ancient administrative power of Rome, which in the thirteenth century remained, in theory, the legal seat of the emperor: “TA(m) QVA(m) ROMA SEDET SEMPRE DVCTVRA TRIVMPHOS / OMNIA DISCERNIT CERTO SVB IVRE COHERCENS” [Just like Rome, [Florence] will consistently lead military victories / [Florence] is discerning its restraint of all under a steady law].

The well-known theme of Florence as second Rome was profoundly embedded in the communal narrative of self-construction and the Dantean palinode of such a theme within the poem. Moreover, this theme resonates with the *Chronica*’s description of how the region of “Tuscia” was ‘invented,’ from Rome’s Christian point of view (5.19-27), in the chapter preceding the narration of Catiline’s conspiracy and the foundation of Florence.¹⁵³ This reference to the *Chronica* should be read as a further example of this theme’s influential roots in Florentine collective memory during Dante’s age.

Indeed, because Dante’s prophetic tone is subsumed by a practical concern with a local matter, it is worth noting the invocation in *Inferno* XXVI linking Florence’s exalted earthly power to its territorial hegemony. In fact, Prato stands in for other small Tuscan municipalities vanquished by Florence and thirsting for revenge against the more powerful city:

Ma se presso al mattin del ver si sogna,
tu sentirai, di qua da picciol tempo,
di quel che Prato, non ch’altri, t’agogna (*Inferno* XXVI 7-9).

Even though the connection between the themes of Florence’s rule over Tuscany and its status as successor of Rome is not initially clear in the inscription, the next lines go on to provide clues. This is particularly evident in the representation of Bartolomeus Nuvoloni. Even though this obscure character appears neither in Dante’s oeuvre nor, to my knowledge, in the early Florentine

¹⁵² The name of the city (“FLORENTIA”) is the grammatical subject of the sentence, as can be seen in the second line on the right column. Furthermore, while the translations cited here are mine, I have followed Mac Cracken’s *Dedication* in translating “orbem” as territory, on the basis of the inscription’s reference to the Tuscan territory (8).

¹⁵³ In commenting on this passage, Chellini emphasizes its medieval sources, namely the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* and Paul the Deacon’s *Historia Romana*. Moreover, he dwells on the fact that “Tuscia” did not overlap with modern “Tuscany” because its southern borders extended to Rome’s neighborhood of Trastevere (63-64).

chronicles, the inscription describes him in terms closely mirroring the figure of Virgil: “MANTVA(m) QVEM GENVIT,” a clear adaptation of Vergil’s famous epitaph: “Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc / Parthenope: cecini pascua, rura, duces.” Moreover, because the eagle traditionally symbolized the Roman Empire’s military prowess, Bartholomeus’ battle standards, “AQVILE” [eagles] emphasize the *primo popolo*’s eagerness to associate Florence with Rome. Whoever commissioned the inscription assumed that an educated Florentine in that age would recognize the most important office related to the new established civic identity, the head of the *popolo* modeled indirectly on Vergil, that is, the most authoritative source of poetry, wisdom and history concerning the Empire.

The inscription’s unequivocal reference to Vergil’s construction of his own fame is deployed as a means of publicly constructing Bartholomeus’ fame, which in turn served as the basis for constructing Florence’s fame. Curiously enough, the verse alluding to this inscription (*Inferno* XXVI, 2) simultaneously alludes to the image of winged fame, a famous Vergilian *topos* originating in the *Aeneid*’s portrayal of fame which “[n]octe volat caeli medio terraeque per umbram” (IV, 184).¹⁵⁴ The absence of Bartholomeus’ name and deeds from the chronicles written during this period begs the question of how consequential he would have been had he not happened to serve just when the inscription was being planned and implemented. In other words, it is hard to reconstruct what, if any, memory remained of this figure during Dante’s politically and poetically active years in Florence. One can imagine how the inscription’s idealization of the prosperous city and its obscure captain might have appeared to Dante. Moreover, Oderisi da Gubbio’s speech in *Purgatorio* XI makes clear that those who pursue earthly fame are guilty of pride, and that earthly fame is fleeting (82-117).

Resuming the analysis of the inscription, the hexameters that follow further reinforce the city’s exaltation while attributing spiritual value to its prosperity:

BARTOLOMEVS ... QVE(m) SIGNA(n)T AQVILE REDDV(n)T SVA SIGNA
 DECORVM / INSIGNVM P(o)P(u)LI QUOD CON(n)FERT GAVDIA VITE; / ILLIS QVI
 CVPIVNT VRBEM CONSVRGERE CELO; / QVAM FOVEAT CHR(istu)S
 CO(n)SERVET FEDERE PACIS; / ET QVIA CV(n)CTORVM FLORENTIA PLENA
 BONORVM...

[Bartholomeus ... whose eagles identify him and whose insignia confer utmost dignity to the *popolo*, which imparts life’s joys to those who desire that their city, which may Christ preserve by means of a pact of peace, rise up to the heavens. And because Florence is full of all sorts of goods...]

Florence’s role as infernal city reinforces the Dantean irony if read in opposition with the inscription’s intention to exalt the city to the heavens (“ILLIS QVI CVPIVNT VRBEM CONSVRGERE CELO”).

Moreover, the claim that “Florentia” is “plena bonorum” is ambiguous, signifying both ‘material goods’ – as for example, Mac Cracken reads in his translation – and ‘morally good people.’ In the first case, the above-cited verses resonate clearly with *Purgatorio* VI’s invective, which expands *Inferno* XXVI, 136-38, engaging in particular with the adjective “ricca” (l. 137) applied to the city:

Or ti fa lieta, ché tu hai ben onde:
 tu ricca, tu con pace e tu con senno!
 S’io dico ’l ver, l’effetto nol nasconde. (*Purgatorio* VI, 136-138)

¹⁵⁴ Antonino Pagliaro *Commento* points out this Vergilian reference by Dante (535).

Moreover, line 137 ironically inverts the inscription's invocation to Christ for the purpose of preserving the city through a pact of peace (QVAM FOVEAT CHR(istu)S CO(n)SERVET FEDERE PACIS), right before the claim that the city is "PLENA BONORUM." Along the same lines, Dante responds to the inscription's fantasy that the *primo popolo* will raise up Florence to the heavens with an ironic reference to the "senno" of the ruling class's actions, which contradict the divine plan for Florence to subject itself to imperial rule. He then closes the circle by insisting that the simple facts reveal whether his claims are true.

In other words, he implicitly reminds readers that Florence, torn by factionalism resulting from an utmost lack of political "senno," is as far as it can possibly be from being protected by a pact of peace mediated by Christ. Thus Dante responds rhetorically to the inscription's representation of Florence's anticlimactic fall from its illegitimate position in the heavens to a condition of peace on earth guaranteed by Christ, and to a city full of 'goods' (or 'good people'). Incidentally, this sequence may have appealed to Dante as a microcosmic counterpart to, or anti-type of, the pilgrim's journey through the realms of hell, purgatory and heaven. More precisely, Dante contrasts the inscription's terms with his climactic use of the words "ricca" – "pace" – "senno" within a succinct and dense verse (137) which synthesizes his indignation against Florence's morally perverted self-justification of its newly acquired political power.

The cross-pollination between Dante's invocation in *Purgatorio* VI and the inscription also extends to the verses immediately preceding the lines cited above:

Fiorenza mia, ben puoi esser contenta
 di questa digression che non ti tocca,
 mercé del *popol tuo* che si argomenta.
 Molti han giustizia in cuore, e tardi scocca
 per non venir senza consiglio a l'arco;
 ma il *popol tuo* l'ha in sommo della bocca.
 Molti rifiutan lo comune incarco;
 ma il *popol tuo* sollicito risponde
 senza chiamare, e grida: "I' mi sobbarco!" (*Purgatorio* VI, 127-135; emphasis added)

Within Dante's political invective, the direct reference to Florence names the *popolo* ("popol tuo") three times, then immediately inserts a clear allusion to the inscription. In so doing, even though the references in ll. 127-135 are not strictly speaking intertextual, unlike l. 137, Dante's poetry can be better understood in relation to its reference to a Florentine landmark.

Dante renews his irony in l. 129, explicitly stating that Florentine factionalism results from the way in which the *popolo* "si argomenta" (129), that is, more precisely, the way in which it concretely carries out its objectives. This expression thus alludes to the city's legal, administrative and military actions, as well as the regime's propaganda, of which the inscription is a key example. Furthermore, just below, the verses dealing with justice (ll. 130-132) should be read in the background of even more precise references to the inscription, and in particular to its closing words. In fact, ll. 20 and 21 of the inscription not only set up a generic relationship between Florence and Rome on the basis of the traditional narratives of filiation, but also claim that the two cities are linked by a guaranteed power "SUB IURE" (line 21). Dante's polemical and ironic response to this claim and his suggestion that Florence deal with justice in a superficial way suggests that he viewed it as evidence of the *primo popolo*'s attempt to justify itself juridically.

Thus, in *Purgatorio* VI, right after the irony towards the *popolo* who "s'argomenta," Dante refers directly to justice, pointing out the difference between the superficiality of the Florentines, who keep justice "in sommo de la bocca," and the many others ("molti," as the preceding and following tercets repeat anaphorically) who are by contrast able to implement justice through wise deliberation. Furthermore, beyond the metaphorical meaning of hasty political decision-making, insofar as the mouth is the means by which a message is conveyed, the expression "in sommo de la

bocca” resonates with the inscription’s public attempts to legitimize the *primo popolo*. In other words, the metaphor of the Florentine *popolo*’s “bocca,” which does not match seamlessly with the preceding metaphor of archery in which ‘true’ civic justice is situated, could instead allude to the public inscription as an expression of the *popolo*’s collective voice. In fact, while the heart and archery are metaphorically related to political institutions concerned with the righteous enactment of justice, the image of the “bocca” – a word which in Dante’s poetry belongs to a lower stylistic level than “cuore” and “arco” – resonates with the lower moral values attached to the public display of self-fabricated law and justice.

I have argued that Dante’s irony towards the 1255 inscription should be understood in relation with his awareness of Brunetto’s direct or indirect involvement with the intellectual and political forces that inspired it. The allusions discussed up to now also fit into a criticism of the political theory underlying the *primo popolo* government. Additionally, the long invective in *Purgatorio* VI includes a further allusion to the *Tresor* which complicates Dante’s direct and indirect criticism of the generation that formed his own. First Dante invokes the emperor, “Alberto tedesco” (l. 97), to regain his legitimate power over Italy, “costei ch’è fatta indomita e selvaggia” (l. 98). He then extends his invocation God, named as “sommo Giove” (l. 118), declaring his own angry misunderstanding of divine will. Then Dante anticlimactically moves on to the invective against Florence, introducing the communal context of his time:

Ché le città d’Italia tutte piene
son di tiranni, ed un Marcel diventa
ogne villan che parteggiando viene. (*Purgatorio* VI 124-126)

The history of the interpretation of these verses is fraught with misunderstanding, especially with regard to the identity attributed to “Marcel.” Certainly the name evokes tyrants mentioned by Lucan and Vergil, probably with anti-imperial motivations.¹⁵⁵

What scholars have not noted is Dante’s allusion in *Purgatorio* VI to Brunetto’s treatise “des governemenz des citez” [On the government of cities], inserted as a conclusion to the third book of the *Tresor*, chapters 73-105, following a lengthy discussion on rhetoric as an art of government. Brunetto’s treatise contains practical advice for any *podestà* aiming to maintain peace and prosperity in his city. The connection between *Purgatorio* VI and Brunetto’s treatise lies in Brunetto’s emphasis on personal and civic virtues of the *podestà*. Brunetto asserts that factionalism arises precisely when these virtues are relegated to a secondary position, allowing a powerful tyrant to rise to power and create discord.¹⁵⁶ Lauro Martinez emphasizes this aspect of Brunetto, though not in relation to Dante.¹⁵⁷ In particular, Martinez focuses on Brunetto’s oligarchic and intellectual conservatism, in the sense that the *podestà*’s power must be based to the greatest extent possible on carefully weighed decisions which exclude the emotional reactions of the masses. Dante’s criticism

¹⁵⁵ Giovanni Fallani summarizes the critical history on this verse: “[L]’avversario di Cesare, Caio Claudio Marcello, console pompeiano (cfr. *Phars.*, I, 313). Altri hanno pensato a Marco Claudio Marcello, che espugnò Siracusa, per cui la frase vorrebbe dire che ogni villano che sale, con l’appoggio del suo partito, si atteggia a liberatore e salvatore della patria. Ma il tema del discorso è l’opposizione all’Impero, per cui ci sembra più convincente la prima ipotesi: ogni persona rozza (*villan*), per essere divenuta capo di un partito, nella sua inetta presunzione comincia con il ribellarsi all’autorità imperiale.” (in Dante Alighieri, *Divina commedia*, ed. Giovanni Fallani e Silvio Zennaro. Roma: Newton Compton Editore, 1994, p. 269)

¹⁵⁶ Ces et les autres vertus doivent les bon citiens garder avant que il eslissent lor seingnor, en tel maniere que il ait en lui tant de bones teches; [mais] li plusors ne resgardent pas a ces mours, ne a ses vertus, ainces se tienent a la force de lui ou de son lignaige, ou a sa volenté ou a l’amor de la ville dont il est. Mes il en sont deceus, car a ce que guerre et haine est si multepliee entre les ytaliens au tens d’ore, et par[mi] le monde en maintes terres, qu’il a deusion en trestoutes les villes et enemisté entre les . ii. parties de borjois, certes, quiconques aquiet l’amor des uns, il li covient avoir la malevoillance des autres. (III.75 14-15)

¹⁵⁷ Lauro Martinez, *Power and Imagination. City and States in Renaissance Italy*. New York: Knopf, 1979, pp. 115-123.

in *Purgatorio* VI, 124-126, consists precisely in revealing the failure of Brunetto's pedagogical and political perspective on this matter. It is not by chance that the invective against Florence appears immediately after these verses.

It should now be clear that Dante's rebuke of Florence *Inferno* XXVI is not merely an allusion to a random Latin hexameter drawn 'archeologically' from a public inscription belonging to the political generation which preceded him and which included Brunetto. Rather, Dante's morally negative view of his city is substantiated by evidence drawn from the urban setting itself. Indeed, Mac Cracken reveals the occurrence of the same verse (in almost identical wording) in both the inscription on the Palazzo del Podestà (1255) and that found in the inscription on the pavement of the Baptistery of San Giovanni, dated around 1207. The inscription in the Baptistery reads:

HVC VENIANT QVICVMQVE VOLVNT MIRANDA VIDERE
 ET VIDEANT QVE VISA VALENT PRO IVRE PLACERE
 FLORIDA CVNCTORVM FLORENTIA PROMPTA BONORVM
 HOC OPUS IMPLICITVM PETIIT PER SIGNA POLOR[UM]

[.....]

IMA PAVIMENTI PERHIBENT INSIGNIA TEMPLI

[May all who wish to see marvelous things come hither, and see things that, when seen, are able to please rightfully. Splendid Florence, readily offering all goods, demands that this work be completed in accordance of the signs of the stars ... The lowest ornaments of the temple demonstrate ...]

In order to demonstrate conclusively that the author of the 1255 inscription is a Florentine citizen, Mac Cracken points out its almost word-for-word reproduction of the third verse seen in the Baptistery in the left column of the inscription, "[w]ith the change of one word – *prompta* to *plena*" (11). The inscription on the Palazzo del Podestà reads: "EST QVIA CVNCTORUM FLORENTIA PLENA BONORVM."

Keeping in mind Dante's deep civic and emotional connection to the Baptistery, integral to his sense of belonging to the urban and spiritual context of his city, it is easy to imagine his disdain at the borrowing expressed in the political inscription by a regime which he considered illegitimate. This disdain was doubtlessly compounded by the fact that Brunetto, or someone with a comparable intellectual and political role in shaping a generation of Florentines, Dante among them, was responsible for this sacrilegious borrowing. How does the poem reflect Dante's reaction? The *Commedia*'s representation of the Baptistery and Dante's historical relationship with it stands in sharp contrast to the poet's allusion to the moral perversion of the *primo popolo*.

Dante's ironic refashioning of some lines from the 1255 inscription can be seen clearly in *Inferno* XIX, when the pilgrim recounts his experience in the bulge of the simoniacs:

Io vidi per le coste e per lo fondo
 piena la pietra livida di fori,
 d'un largo tutti e ciascun era tondo.
 Non mi parean men ampi né maggiori
 che que' che son nel mio bel San Giovanni,
 fatti per loco de' battezzatori;
 l'un de li quali, ancor non è molt'anni,
 rupp'io per un che dentro v'annegava:
 e questo sia suggel ch'ogn'omo sganni. (ll. 13-21)

From a literal standpoint, Dante compares the pilgrim's vision to a spiritually loaded feature of the Florentine landscape, namely the very heart of the Baptistery, its baptismal fonts. The range of implications resulting from this choice have gone virtually unheeded by readers of the canto, who

rather tend to underscore the exiled Dante's enduring affection for his city, substantiated by the description "bel San Giovanni." The recurrence of the same adjective to describe the Baptistery in *Paradiso* XXV 8 *seqq.* has reinforced this positive view, as well as Dante's claim in *Paradiso* that he will be crowned there as a poet.

Beneath the surface layer of insistence on the positively charged value of the Baptistery, from both a personal and a spiritual point of view, there is a further allusion to the sacrilegious pilfering of the Baptistery's inscription, as revealed in the pilgrim's apostrophe to Brunetto in *Inferno* XV: "m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna" (85). The octagonal shape of the Baptistery – the physical place of Christian initiation into eternal life – symbolizes eternity, because eight represents the number beyond earthly time, one more than the seven days it took for God to create the world. Dante's use of the verb "s'eterna" in such a rhetorically charged context may very well be motivated by the desire to rebuke Brunetto (either personally or as a symbol of his political generation) for his involvement in the act of transposing the words from a context associated with eternity onto an illicit and mundane political project. In fact, the 1255 inscription adopts a tone that is both pseudo-spiritual and hubristic, to which Dante indignantly responds by harnessing the full range of his rhetorical powers.

The line in question (14) directly follows a pair of lines in which first Christ is invoked as a tool for restoring civic peace according to the *primo popolo's* political project:

INSIGNVM P(o)P(u)LI QUOD CON(n)FERT GAVDIA VITE;
 ILLIS QVI CVPIVNT VRBEM CONSVRGERE CELO;
 QVAM FOVEAT CHR(istu)S CO(n)SERVET FEDERE PACIS;
 ET QVIA CV(n)CTORVM FLORENTIA PLENA BONORVM... (13-14)

[... *popolo*, which imparts life's joys to those who desire that their city, which may Christ preserve by means of a pact of peace, rise up to the heavens. And because Florence is full of all sorts of goods...]

More precisely, the *primo popolo* usurps Christ's salvific role and at the same time preposterously relegates Him to the role comparable to that of Mars within the collective imagination, as represented in Chapter 37 of the first book of the *Tresor*, as well as in verses 143-150 of *Inferno* XIII, in the speech of the anonymous Florentine suicide. If, as I argue, the pilgrim's praise of Brunetto's teachings on the human quest for eternal life alludes to Brunetto's direct or indirect involvement in the reuse of the Baptistery's inscription on behalf of the *primo popolo's* project, the line "m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna" represents the culmination of the poet's bitter irony towards his 'master.' In light of these considerations, I propose a new reading of the lines in which the pilgrim addresses Brunetto.

In conclusion, more importantly than serving as a source, the inscription shapes Florentine civic identity by providing a cultural narrative aimed at generating collective memory. In turn, it was part of the heritage which shaped Dante's civic identity and deep, albeit fraught, sense of belonging to Florence. In this sense, along with many other civic narratives at stake, it deals with issues relevant to Dante's political ideology and its poetical outcomes in the *Commedia* from its very beginning. For example, its allusion to Vergil in presenting the 'Capitano del Popolo' as an imperial commander seems to corroborate the hypothesis that, in light of a collective identity created by cultural narratives propagated by the new communal regime, Dante's choice of Virgil as a guide should be explained not only because of his poetic mastery, but also for the political message regarding the divinely inspired role of the empire whose looseness during Dante's age, led to worldly confusion, conflicts, and human unhappiness.

Once again, the point here is not that such a single instance drawn from the urban environment can be critically conceived as decisive to resolve such an interpretative crux. Instead, this coincidence substantiates the importance of communal narratives in building civic identity. The

wider network of mutually reinforcing references of which the inscription is an example can be traced in the *Commedia*.

Conclusion

Subverting the Political Values of Florentine Foundational Myths in the Cacciaguida Episode

In the so-called Cacciaguida episode (*Paradiso* XV-XVIII), Dante's ancestor serves as the spokesman for the poet's beliefs, providing an idyllic portrait of late eleventh-century Florentine society in contrast with the moral and political decadence of the poet's own age. Keeping in mind my reading of passages preceding the Cacciaguida episode, this concluding chapter explores Dante the author's response to communal memory in that episode against the background of the medieval early Florentine chronicle tradition's effort in shaping the communal memory, thereby connecting that episode to those episodes of the *Commedia* discussed in earlier chapters.

In fact, in those chapters I have pointed out how the chronicles' myth of the city's origins seamlessly merges into the representation of historical events up to Dante's own times, recounting communal Florence's political and military efforts to assert its economic and demographic growth. In detail, in Chapter One, I explained the persistence of Florence's implicit self-justification in subduing and colonizing the neighboring territories by connecting the ancient chronicles' invocation of those myths, which resist the historical facts leading to the foundation of the community. Chapters Two and Three placed the role played by the chronicles in the political context of the construction of communal collective memory in the thirteenth century, from the point of view both of Dante's intellectual precursors in communal Florence (Brunetto Latini) and of certain tangible landmarks relating to the communal Florentine context (namely, the inscription on the Palazzo del Podestà and the statue of Mars).

In this concluding chapter, I further explore Dante's critical response to the politically charged construction of collective memory, analyzing Dante's presentation of the chronicle tradition in the Cacciaguida episode, one I would tentatively describe as 'subversive.' In fact, instead of alluding to the ethical perversion of the self-justifying political purpose of the chronicles' role, as I have argued in discussing *Inferno* XIII and XV, in Cacciaguida's speech the famous direct reference to the chronicle tradition emphasizes the moral virtues practiced by Florentines before the city's commercial and political expansion.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, I will show how pervasive is the memory of such civic mythologies throughout the whole Cacciaguida episode, which cannot be fully appreciated and understood if we take the above-mentioned citation outside the historical context at stake in constructing medieval Florentines' civic identity. After this intimate hearth-centered scenario, Cacciaguida – or, better put, Dante the poet through Cacciaguida's voice – then sharply contrasts these virtues with the greedy pursuit of money and power emblematic of the *Florentina civitas* during Dante's age.

In *Paradiso* XV, Florence's hegemonic and commercial enterprise is associated with the moral decline leading to the civic factionalism responsible for ending peace within the city, and thus also for disrupting God's plan for the happiness and salvation of mankind. The earthly dimension of this decline is explained in its details in *Paradiso* XVI's famous list of waning traditional noble Florentine families native to the city and integral to the providential monarchical order, in contrast with the rising families, who, motivated by power and greed, moved to Florence from the surrounding countryside. Then Cacciaguida links this degeneration to the universal theme of the natural decadence of human deeds. *Paradiso* XVII pivots explicitly around the relationship between

¹⁵⁸ In the opening of Chapter One of the present work, I cited the famous verses which directly refer to the chronicles, in the context of Cacciaguida's reconstruction of the *buon tempo antico* when the Florentine women used to tell stories related to the city's foundation: "l'altra, traendo a la rocca la chioma, / favoleggiava con la sua famiglia / d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma." (*Paradiso* XV, 124-126). See in the same chapter the extensive network of relations discussed between the three citizenships/cities cited by Cacciaguida and the foundation of Florence as recounted in the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae*: Troy, Faesulae and Rome actually build up the structure around which the narrative unfolds.

Cacciaguida and Dante in dealing with the poet's own traumatic exile, and it is noteworthy that he chooses Cacciaguida to complete the series of *post-factum* prophecies about his exile.

My reading also takes into account the two major factors blamed for the negative turn of events in Florence within the Cacciaguida episode's political viewpoint, namely immigration from Florence's neighboring territories and the Church's greedy attempt to usurp the power rightfully belonging to secular rule. While Dante seems to display the chronicles' representation of the foundational myths as representative of Florentine civic identity, he inverts their terms by disconnecting the myths from any justification of an expansionist project, proposing instead a conservative political and social vision shaped by the traumas of experience, both that of the factionalized city and that of his own exile.

“Favoleggiava con la sua famiglia / d'i troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma” (*Paradiso XV*, 125-126)

As discussed in Chapter One, the foundation of Fiesole, Troy and Rome and the relationships among those cities are centrally at stake in the stories narrated in the chronicle tradition. Significantly, all three cities appear in Cacciaguida's famous lines: “favoleggiava ... d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma” (*Paradiso XV*, 125-126). In order to unfold the creative link between Dante and these traditions, it should be emphasized that these two verses are part of the wider context of Cacciaguida's portrait of Florence's virtues during the late eleventh century:

Fiorenza dentro de la cerchia antica
ond'ella toglie ancora e terza e nona,
si stava in pace, sobria e pudica.
Non avea catenella, non corona,
non gonne contigiate, non cintura
che fosse a veder più che la persona ... (*Paradiso XV*, 97-102)

Thus, the context makes clear that the political point of view expressed in the canto can be defined as ‘reactionary,’ in the sense that Dante's desired political innovations aspire to restore an idyllic, ancient political order which, from our historical retrospective, was almost anachronistic, even during the first decades of the fourteenth century in Europe, when the ‘national’ monarchies and the Italian ‘city-states’ were about to overcome the Holy Roman Empire. Florence's golden age is thus described as preceding the political and moral decadence of the independent and republican commune once its citizens split off into the Guelph and Ghibelline factions following Buondelmonte's murder in 1216, as alluded to in *Paradiso XVII*, 136-142, by Cacciaguida himself.

More precisely, it is important first of all to point out that communal republicanism in fact is integrated into Dante's reflection on history to the extent that it severed the political bond of loyalty between Florence and the Holy Roman Emperor. On the one hand, Cacciaguida himself proudly claims to belong to an age in which such a bond actually existed, to the point that the most important earthly achievement desirable for a Florentine citizen was to be girt with knighthood by the emperor. Indeed, Cacciaguida proudly recounts that he earned this privilege from the Emperor Conrad, following him as a crusader (*Paradiso XV*, 139-141). On the other hand, this set of values implies that Cacciaguida's will to serve the empire in the name of the Christian faith was so strong that, according to the paradoxical logic of sainthood, it pushed him to abandon both his civic “dolce ostello” (132) and his own family, resulting in his death as a martyr, in the spirit of medieval contempt of the earthly world, which closes *Paradiso XV*:

Quivi fu' io da quella gente turpa
disviluppato dal mondo fallace,
lo cui amor molt'anime deturpa;

e venni dal martirio a questa pace. (145-148)

The point is reinforced circularly by the authorial voice at the beginning of the canto:

Bene è che senza termine si doglia
chi, per amore di cosa che non duri
etternalmente, quello amor si spoglia (10-12)

Thus contempt for earthly things emerges as a distinguishing feature of the souls in the heaven of Mars, within the background of an idealized vision of the earthly city of ancient Florence as a pre-figuration of the heavenly city.

Longing for imperial control over Florence, the only condition able to guarantee peace according to Dante's political ideology, is melancholically evoked later in Cacciaguida's speech (*Paradiso* XVI, 127-132). Here, after a long list of the ancient noble Florentine families, Dante's ancestor praises the control exercised over such families by Hugh the Great, who in the second half of the tenth century was Marquis of Tuscany and vicar of the Emperor Otto III. Hugh the Great is defined as "gran barone" (128),¹⁵⁹ to underscore the contrast with the morally abject political leadership during Dante's time. In fact, this positively charged figure stands in opposition to Dante's contemporary Giano della Bella, who still uses "la bella insegna" (127), the Marquis' emblem, because his family earned the title of knighthood from Hugh himself. Nevertheless, Giano devotes himself to the popular cause, in accordance with the factionalist mentality which Dante found so contemptible.

Thus, according to Dante's fictional projection of ancient Florentine times, the idyllic balance imagined to have existed between communal institutions and the Imperial suzerainty was broken by the emergence of a new and wealthy social class which quickly rose to power within the developing Florentine commune. Dante's reaction to this social development has been explained in Robert Hollander and Albert Rossi's seminal article "Il repubblicanesimo di Dante." In fact, as divergent as republican and imperial ideals may seem to us today, the two scholars point out that from Dante's point of view, the providential restoration of the empire would be accompanied by a revamping of the truly re-established republican ideals. This re-establishment would be introduced by the positive portrayal of Roman republican figures throughout the *Commedia*, and of the reinterpretation of the myth of Florence's *buon tempo antico* in the Cacciaguida cantos as a cultural reincarnation of Rome's republican civic virtues.¹⁶⁰

Thus, it is by an allusive contrast with such an ideal condition that Dante represents the rising social class as characterized by a pervasive greed which destroyed the civic community in the long run, leading to factionalism and exile, and eventually undermining the ideal possibility of balance between imperial suzerainty and republican government itself. Hollander and Rossi do not explain, though, why Dante chooses to present in *Paradiso* XV such an idyllic city whose memories are built on communal narratives which were clearly meant to proudly self-justify the forming commune against the empire's providential control. I propose that a reading of Dante's apparent, ambivalence towards such memories in the Cacciaguida episode should take into account a larger set of connections within the *Commedia* itself.

¹⁵⁹ As Umberto Bosco points out in the comment on this verse in his edition of the *Commedia*, the title of "barone" refers to the greatness of the person, meaning a "great person, great master," rather than merely referring to a noble title. This sense of reverence is reinforced by the fact that in the Middle Ages such a title also designated Jesus and the Saints. See for example *Paradiso* XXIV, 115, and *Paradiso* XXV, 17, where both Saint Peter and Saint James are granted that title.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Hollander and Albert Rossi, "Il repubblicanesimo di Dante," *Studi americani su Dante*, eds. Gian Carlo Alessio and Robert Hollander, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989, 297-323.

The meaning behind Cacciaguida's Florentine narratives

In fact, insofar as Cacciaguida's point of view roughly coincides with that of Dante the author, *Paradiso* XV epitomizes the pattern regarding the *buon tempo antico*, which recurs throughout the whole poem, and is charged with ethical and political values. Before and in parallel with Cacciaguida, the "Romagnuolo" Guido del Duca in *Purgatorio* XIV first nostalgically reminisces about his land in chivalric terms: "le donne e' cavalier, li affanni e li agi / che ne 'nvogliava amore e cortesia / là dove i cuor son fatti sì malvagi" (109-111). Moreover, before providing his own nostalgic account in *Purgatorio* XVI, Marco Lombardo answers the pilgrim's question about the reason for such widespread decadence:

Soleva Roma, che 'l buon mondo feo,
due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada
facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.
L'un l'altro ha spento; ed è giunta la spada
col pastorale, e l'un con l'altro insieme
con viva forza mal convien che vada;
però che giunti, l'un l'altro non teme. (106-112)

Going well beyond the issue of the single city of Florence, and indeed, opening up the concept of decadence to the broader Northern Italian landscape, such instances are meant to be understood within the context of Dante's political ideology.

In contrast with the theocratic claim that culminated with Pope Boniface VIII, according to which, in the absence of a legitimate emperor, the pope could exercise the powers of both pope and emperor, Dante asserts that according to the will of God, human happiness and peace are impossible in the absence of a distinction between earthly and spiritual powers. This is the "two suns" theory alluded to by Marco Lombardo in the passage above, and also elaborated on in Dante's political treatise, the *Monarchia*. It is well-known that Emperor Henry VII's Italian enterprise, which was meant to restore the ancient order that was so prized by the poet, had likely already failed with the emperor's death in 1312, at a time when Dante was writing the *Purgatorio*, whose examples and nostalgic tone already seem to reflect the poet's disappointment at the failure of Henry's restorative attempt.

Thus, the communal foundational myths expand the horizons of interpretation by shedding greater light on Dante's poetic enactment of his own political views. Addressing the previously cited line, "favoleggiava ... d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma" (*Paradiso* XV, 125-126), beyond its evident idealization conveyed by the contextual portrait of familial intimacy, one could state that such mythical tales represented a way to assert and consolidate a type of civic identity, based on a set of shared and popular memories. The meaning and value of these narratives, however, are complicated by the verb chosen by Dante, "favoleggiava" (125). Indeed, scholars have extensively debated its meaning in the context of Cacciaguida's speech. In particular, they disagree on the basic sense it implies, whether Cacciaguida is stating that the ancient Florentine women were retelling pleasant lies or that the verb implies the morally neutral sense of storytelling.¹⁶¹

Understanding that the issue can neither be solved linguistically nor through contextual literary analysis, which are the two means that have been attempted thus far, it should be acknowledged that this pivotal verb hints at the fact that the meaning of the early Florentine chronicles should more likely be read on the basis of the ways in which Dante integrated the ancient Florentine chronicles into his poetry. Using this approach, I reassess the importance of consistently situating the meaning of the pivotal term "favoleggiava" in the bigger picture of the poet's

¹⁶¹ Chellini *Chronica* 152-153: a broader skimming through the whole Dantean corpus does not seem to help, as the poet uses it several times in both the senses described above.

conception of the social and political evolution of his city. In fact, by having his ancestor conjugate the verb in the imperfect, “favoleggiava,” which indicates an ongoing action in the past, Dante not only implies that during his own time such a narrative tradition was virtually lost but also that such a loss was inextricably connected with Florence’s moral decadence. Consequently, alongside those comforting and foundational civic fables, retold in the intimate space of the eleventh-century household, Dante expresses the moral values that constituted the core of ancient Florence. These are the basic ideas that once had made the city flourish, both morally and through civic pride, which had since faded away.

Even more precisely, in Cacciaguida’s speech, the civic *fabulae* and the moral basis of the ancient civic values are so strictly interconnected that it seems one cannot exist without the other. As a corollary, Dante, through Cacciaguida, implies that as a result of the disappearance of such values, either the ‘fabulae’ have disappeared altogether, or if they are still retold, they have lost their original moral value. Due to the high concentration of issues regarding Florentine civic history and the values at stake in the entire Cacciaguida episode, in which the Alighieri family plays an exemplary role, I argue that these problems should serve as a starting point for evaluating the influence of the *Chronica de origine civitatis florentiae*, the most ancient Florentine chronicle, on the *Commedia* as a whole. In this sense, the textual references, which scholars have already identified and which make the *Chronica* virtually the only Dantean source for ancient Florentine history, do not represent a mere erudite intertextual game; instead, they acquire a deeper resonance within the context of Dante’s own vision and representation of history, and in a broader sense, reflect his world and poetics.

If, for the moment, we give literal credit to Cacciaguida, accepting that the tradition of mothers’ oral narratives of Florence’s mythical origins within the intimate space of the family had already faded away during Dante’s time, we may be tempted to argue that Dante recovered from the *Chronica* both the legendary and the historical facts concerning his ancestor’s idyllic Florence the time of the *buon tempo antico*. However, this hypothesis could just as easily be dismissed as an excessive oversimplification, not least for the obvious reason that Cacciaguida could not plausibly serve as a representative of his own time, as he clearly functions as a fictional projection of Dante into the past. The following comparison with Brunetto’s use of the Florentine myths further clarifies this point.

Dante’s two “fathers”: Brunetto and Cacciaguida

The salient roles of the characters of Brunetto and Cacciaguida as father-like figures for Dante the pilgrim are so well established in the scholarship as to have become virtually commonplace. Thus, from the interpretive point of view of Dante’s readers, it should be remembered that Dante wrote the Cacciaguida episode with Brunetto in mind, and that in many ways Cacciaguida serves as an upright counterpart to the infernal Brunetto. What is remarkable, and much less acknowledged by the *Commedia*’s readers, is that this relationship is introduced into the poem by means of the pilgrim’s dialogues, first with Brunetto and then with Cacciaguida, which is to say, the two most important ‘father’ figures, each of whom initiates a dialogue in which Dante the pilgrim participates. The pilgrim/son, in turn, seems to appreciate and recognize each of them in the context of a digression while in the process of discussing civic foundational history. In other words, it is Dante the author who carefully emphasizes the father-like figures’ agency rather than the pilgrim’s, and he fits this rhetorical strategy into the larger historical and political context.

A closer look at the text reveals that Brunetto first recognizes Dante (“Così adocchiato da cotal famiglia, / fui conosciuto da un che mi prese / per lo limbo e gridò: ‘qual meraviglia!’” [*Inf.* XV, 22-23]), and soon thereafter, the teacher calls his pupil ‘son’ twice (“O figliuol,” *Inf.* XV, 31 and 37). The pilgrim seems to reciprocate by acknowledging Brunetto’s paternal role (“la cara e buona imagine paterna” [*Inf.* XV, 83]), but only after Brunetto’s prophecy regarding Dante’s

destiny within the political context of Florence, including the above-cited allusions to the *Chronica de origine* regarding the city's foundational myths.

Similarly, in *Paradiso* XV, it is Cacciaguida who approaches the pilgrim, even though he does so in spiritually inspired terms and by pointing out their blood relationship (“*O sanguis meus, o superinfusa / gratia Dei*” ll., 28-29). This occurs in clear opposition to Brunetto. It also embeds a clear allusion to Anchises approaching Aeneas with affection and tenderness in the Elysian Fields in the *Aeneid* (VI, 684-89). Cacciaguida then repeats the point obsessively afterwards, first paraphrasing the former Latin using vernacular speech (“«Benedetto sia tu», fu, «trino e uno, / che nel mio seme se’ tanto cortese!» ll., 47-48), and then by calling the pilgrim “figlio” (l., 52). The pilgrim wholeheartedly recognizes the extent of the “paterna festa” (l., 84) and he is further confirmed by Cacciaguida’s solemn recognition: “«O fronda mia in che io compiaccemmi / pur aspettando, io fui la tua radice»” (ll., 88-89). This occurs before Cacciaguida presents his famous description of Florence in the *buon tempo antico*.

Paralleling the answer to Brunetto, the pilgrim then reciprocates Cacciaguida’s recognition of their relationship, closing the circle in answering him: “Io cominciai: «Voi siete il padre mio” (*Par.* XVI, 16); “Ditemi dunque, cara mia primizia” (*Par.* XVI, 22). Thus, it turns out that both episodes not only allude to a father-son relationship, with an emphasis on each father’s agency, but also that they are structurally built around that relationship. Here we see a clear typological inversion that this implicit comparison suggests, that is, Cacciaguida and Brunetto as father-like types and anti-types respectively. This leads to the questions of how and exactly why Dante the author places them alongside references to Florentine foundational myths.

To begin with, I propose that the Dantean characters of Brunetto and Cacciaguida should be regarded as exemplary Florentine individuals, each belonging to a different age of their city’s history, and both endowed with a symbolic father-like agency within their respective civic context. However, at least in the case of Brunetto, such an approach should also take into consideration the ironic treatment received in the background of his historical persona, which I discuss in Chapter Two, specifically with regard to his cultural, pedagogical, and political roles. Although we are aware that Dante had an ancestor by the name of Cacciaguida, a historical figure who existed and lived in Florence around the first half of the twelfth century,¹⁶² a lack of archival sources on Dante’s great-great-grandfather prevents the sort of comparative reading of the literary Brunetto against the true historical person. Thus, even though the exemplary figure of Dante’s ancestor is demonstrated as a model citizen of virtue, to the point of self-sacrifice to God under the guidance of the emperor, the lack of historical credibility cannot be dismissed.¹⁶³ In establishing a comparative reading between the ‘historical’ and the ‘fictional’ Cacciaguida we must keep in mind that the Dantean imagination could have developed more freely the fictional aspects than in the case of his civic master Brunetto.

As a consequence of my interpretive hypothesis in reading the two fictional father-like figures using their historical contexts, the way in which they deal with the ancient Florentine narrative can help clarify their proper corresponding roles within the poem. In fact, it is precisely their pedagogical roles, as civic guides, within the civic context, that make their citations resonate so strongly in the foundational Florentine narratives. In other words, the narratives’ guiding role in building up civic identity and the use of Brunetto and Cacciaguida as father-like figures do overlap and shed light on the reading. This is especially true if we also consider that the identity of ‘citizen’

¹⁶² As Fallani reminds us *ad locum*, when commenting on *Par.* XV, 31, besides what Dante writes in *Paradiso*, only one document found in the Florentine archives proves his existence attesting that Cacciaguida was already dead in the year 1189. It should be remembered that Dante attributes to Cacciaguida a birth date of 1091, according to the convoluted astronomical counts in *Par.* XVI, 37-39. Thus, fiction and history largely seem to overlap in the case of Cacciaguida.

¹⁶³ As Bosco-Reggio reminds us *ad locum*, commenting on *Par.* XV, 139, clarifying the point regarding Dante’s confusion between Conrad II and Conrad III made by other modern commentators, there is an actual historical probability that a Florentine citizen could have been knighted by Conrad III Hohenstaufen before participating in the disastrous — for the Christians — Second Crusade in Holy Land between 1147 and 1149.

belonged primarily to the adult male figures in the Italian communes, as Claire Honess points out.¹⁶⁴ To push this idea further, a comparison of the ways in which they deal with such traditions can clarify a textual interpretation that emphasizes the civic and historical background of the poem.

To begin with, Brunetto and Cacciaguida seem to use the *Chronica de origine* in a similar fashion, in the sense that, in citing the theme of the interbreeding of ‘native’ Florentines (i.e., those descended from the Romans) with ‘non-natives’, both characters seem to regard the foundational myths as truthful; or at the very least, they never dismiss them, nor allude to the fact that the commune encouraged the fabrication of these narratives for political purposes. At the same time, both Brunetto and Cacciaguida are winking at Dante the pilgrim in an attempt to confirm that he belongs to the ‘good seeds.’ For both Brunetto and Cacciaguida, the myths are kept as foundational for Florentine civic identity. The most evident difference between the ways in which they are cited relates to Cacciaguida’s insertion of them within a Christian theme, in curious accordance with the second half of the *Chronica* itself. In other words, from the standpoint of Florentine mythologies, a preliminary comparison between Brunetto and Cacciaguida further emphasizes the distance between these two characters. In fact, Dante’s Brunetto embodies twisted civic values which overlap with those of his historical counterpart. Cacciaguida, by contrast, embodies the Christian conception of *civitas* within the context of the universal Empire.

Upon closer inspection, however, the similarities and differences in the ways in which the characters of Brunetto and Cacciaguida approach the *Chronica* are more nuanced and complex. In fact, Brunetto clearly alludes generically to the myth of the Faesulans as the reason for the civic ‘pollution’ of the original Roman-based citizens. Cacciaguida, on the other hand, while citing Fiesole, between ‘i Troiani’ and ‘Roma,’ in the context of the tale told by the woman in the hearths, makes no central, direct connection between the list of families in *Paradiso* XVI and the ‘original’ sin of Florence, that is, the mythology of its foundation, created by the mixing of Romans and Faesulans.

In fact, the bulk of the greedy families that immigrated into Florence, as cited by Cacciaguida – the Conti, the Cerchi, the Buondelmonti (XVI, 64-67), among others, for a total of thirteen relevant families – are described as originating *outside* of Florence, without any connection with Fiesole at all. The ancient myth is not alluded to at this point. And here there is only one exception, which proves the rule, and it regards the Caponsacco family (“Già era il Caponsacco nel mercato / disceso giù da Fiesole ...” [*Par.* XVI, 121-22]). Nonetheless, although the mention of Fiesole can subtly allude to the original descent of the Faesulans, when Florence was founded, it also clear that it refers to a much more recent, ‘early medieval’ wave of immigration that gave rise to the mercantile Florence of Dante’s own time. On the contrary, Brunetto cites the Faesulans, who descended into Florence “*ab antiquo*,” and makes no reference to the most recent wave of immigration.

To summarize, Brunetto’s speech points towards the original and sinful intermingling of the morally good (the Romans) and the bad (the Faesulans), which gave rise to the foundation of Florence, whereas Cacciaguida emphasizes the recent arrival of powerful, foreign families into Florence in the time between his own era and that of his descendant, Dante. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Brunetto (*Inferno* XV, 61-78) does not explicitly exclude the possibility of subsequent waves of morally bankrupt immigrants, who could have overlapped with the original Faesulans, and whose legacy – in Brunetto’s view – is still present in contemporary Florence. At the same time, Cacciaguida somehow admits that Florence’s ethical problem in dealing with the recent ‘bad’ immigrants is more deeply rooted in the city’s history.

¹⁶⁴ Claire Honess, “Feminine Virtues and Florentine Vices: Citizenship and Morality in *Paradiso* XV-XVII,” in *Dante and Governance*, ed. John Woodhouse (Oxford: Clarendon 1997), especially pp. 108-114. According to Honess, Dante, quite ironically, chose the Florentine women as agents of the intimate transmission of the Florentine civic traditions because of their actual status of non-citizens, which set them apart from any destructive political factionalism. It should be added to this that the famous myth of the origins of Florentine factionalism attributes to a woman, Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti’s mother-in-law, the agency that begins the tragic division of the city.

In fact, right in the middle of his jeremiad, while listing such families, Dante's ancestor admits that:

Sempre la confusion de le persone
 principio fu del mal de la cittade,
 come del vostro il cibo che s'appone,
e cieco toro più avaccio cade
 che cieco agnello, e molte volte taglia
 più e meglio una che cinque spade. (*Paradiso XVI*, 67-72)

In so doing, Cacciaguida implicitly, but without doubt, admits that Florence's 'original sin,' as recounted by both the *Chronica* and Brunetto in *Inferno XV*, did actually take place. Chellini points out a further clue in that direction, compellingly suggesting that the above reference to the "spade" alludes to the *Chronica*'s description of Florence's civic symbol, the lily, whose central leaf looks like a short sword. This is emblematic, Chellini tells us, as the original name of *Florentia* is explained as a fusion between *flos* and *ensis*, that is, the flower and the sword.¹⁶⁵ But if so, how is it possible that Cacciaguida is not making up an ideal *civitas* during his own time? In other words, despite the fact that the heavenly souls are God-like and reflect the truth, the episode raises the question of how Cacciaguida's description of Florence could be considered truthful. This is reinforced by Dante's representation of Florence as intrinsically *civitas diaboli* on the basis of its foundation.

The answer to this issue is critical to my interpretation of Cacciaguida's speech, which expresses the moral and literal value of his character, as well as Dante's own ideology with regard to the broad political and ethical issues at stake in his works. If we decide that Cacciaguida is indeed a liar, a whole set of hermeneutical problems appears, not only about the *Paradiso*'s central *canti* but also regarding our understanding of the whole *cantica*, where the speaking souls represent the truthful point of view of God himself, themselves active participants in the divine. Thus, we can see that the whole purpose of Dante's poetic enterprise would risk collapse, and the risk of deception as embedded in the poetic word – so deeply at stake in the *Inferno*, at least from the Gerion episode onwards – would not allow for the possibility of redemption and salvation. I would exclude this interpretation.

Rather, I argue that the Cacciaguida episode deploys a subversive interpretation of Florence's most important civic mythology. This occurs when the character Cacciaguida, in support of Dante's imperial project, cites the very same myths that the staunchly pro-republican *Chronica* propagated. Furthermore, from the point of view of how Dante uses the materials of the *Chronica* throughout the *Commedia*, there is a second subversive layer, in the sense that Dante's allusions to *Chronica* mythologies in the *Inferno* highlight the manipulative nature of its civic narratives.

Thus, one may very well ask how Cacciaguida's Florence could be such an ideal city, if its very foundation was so compromised by the mixing of the Romans and Faesulans. As Cacciaguida himself points out:

Tutti color ch'a quel tempo eran ivi
 da poter arme tra Marte e 'l Batista,
 erano il quinto di quei ch'or son vivi.
Ma la cittadinanza, ch'è or mista
 di Campi, di Certaldo e di Fegghine,
 pura vediesi ne l'ultimo artista. (*Paradiso XVI*, 46-51)

¹⁶⁵ Chellini *Chronica* 170.

In these verses, Cacciaguida completely eradicates the traditional view, also cited by Brunetto, that Florence was founded while in the process of mixing of “good” and “bad” people. What remains of these traditions in Cacciaguida’s account is the noble genealogy, which, in the wake of Troy’s destruction, led to the foundation of Florence. Yet, there are textual clues that further complicate the picture. In fact, just a few lines after those cited above, Cacciaguida refers to Florence’s original sin:

Sempre la confusion de le persone
principio fu del mal de la cittade,
come del vostro il cibo che s’appone. (*Paradiso* XVI, 67-69)

By referencing the medieval mixing of Florentine citizens with country dwellers, and opening this with the word “Sempre,” Cacciaguida implicitly guides readers who are familiar with the *Chronica* to the myth of Florence as founded by the admixture of Romans and Faesulans, thus reinforcing this aspect of Brunetto’s retelling of Florence’s founding.

As strikingly ambiguous as this overlapping is, between the infernal father-figure of Brunetto and his heavenly counterpart Cacciaguida, Dante deploys Cacciaguida’s voice in order to construct a new foundational civic mythology. In other words, Cacciaguida’s allusion to the admixture of people, followed by the golden age of Florence in his own day, emphasizes the possibility of Florence as a righteous *civitas*, able to transcend any replication of its shameful roots by once again evolving into a peaceful city. In so doing, in the *Paradiso* Dante also emphasizes the failure of Florence to capture this possibility during his own time, especially after the death of Emperor Henry VII, which cut short the imperial project of restoring peace to Italy.

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