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Dante Alighieri's "Comedy": codices, copyists and scriptures[*]

In the last few years, there have been several surveys – not only the codicological-palaeographical ones – dedicated to the manuscript tradition of Dante's *Comedy*, that have achieved significant results: just looking at the editions of Salerno Editrice publishing on Dante's commentaries[1], or at the most recent philological research (intended mostly to build on the National Edition by Giorgio Petrocchi, produced on the occasion of the 7th centenary of the birth of the Poet, and published in the years 1966-67)[2], as well as the vigorous revival of studies on the manuscripts and ateliers, which led to the recent discovery of a new portrait of Homer in Dante's Toledo codex (a Giovanni Boccaccio autograph)[3]. Nevertheless, a few scholars have dedicated themselves to investigating the different codex typologies that are peculiar to the manuscript tradition of the *Divine Comedy*[4].

Thus, the aim of this paper is to identify the formal standard features of Dante's codices that allow us to collect the manuscripts into precise groups, i.e. to distinguish handbook types, realized by the copyists as such, and henceforth demanded and sought after by customers. In other words, our purpose is to verify if Dante's *Comedy*, in its extraordinary tradition, had a model book, or also more several patterns attributable to the nature and form of the manuscripts.

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[1] Among the most recent at least worthy of note is VOLPI (2010); AZZETTA (2012); RINALDI (2013); and the most recent commentary by PAVARINI (2014).

[2] A phase inaugurated *grosso modo* with the revised reprint of the work (PETROCCHI, 1966-1967), that certainly stimulated, after some decades of quiet, interest in the text of the *Commedia*. Thus, remarkable publications followed, such as the editions LANZA (1995); and SANGUINETI (2001). But worth mentioning, among others are the most recent specialized studies collected firstly in TROVATO (2007); and later in TONELLO – TROVATO (2013).

[3] See at least BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004); BERTELLI (2011a); (2016). The discovery of Homer's portrait was announced for the first time by Sandro Bertelli and Marco Cursi in the paper *E Boccaccio raffigurò Omero*, published on p. 25 of the Sunday issue of *Il Sole 24ore*, July 15, 2012; while the first scientific inquiry appeared in the paper BERTELLI – CURSI (2012, 287-95).

[4] As in the case of the survey and study of 14th century manuscripts in humanistic script, on which see BERTELLI (2007a).

As is well known, a little, or almost nothing is known about the earliest circulation of the Poem. According to the most recent scholarship, when Dante's sons, Pietro and Iacopo, returned to Florence – both were already in the Tuscan city in 1325 – the *Comedy* was unquestionably already in its complete and unitary form, that is to say, with the three *cantiche* (or parts) collected: we do not know where this was realized, maybe in a town in northern Italy, possibly in Emilia or Romagna[5]. The fact is that, if we are to believe the indications in the Aldine edition of 1515, owned by the erudite Florentine Luca Martini (now at the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan, known as *Mart*)[6], a codex written by the parish priest Forese Donati between October 1330 and January 1331 circulated in Florence and thus contained the entire Poem. That manuscript seems to have been lost, but there are several identified variants, such as those taken up in 1548 by Luca Martini in his exemplar. Nevertheless, aside from these readings and the fact that it was written – according to Martini's own description – «in a mercantile hand» (to be understood in its more generic acceptation to mean 'cursive'), we know nothing else about what this ancient manuscript may have looked like[7]. Martini also owned another codex, used with other copies in 1546 at the parish church of San Gavino in Mugello, where the erudite Florentine had gone to collate the *Comedy* in the company of Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565), among others. However, all we know about this codex is that it was on «vellum [parchment] well written in the year 1329», but it too is now part of the long list of manuscripts of the *Comedy* that have been lost forever[8]. All that remain of the oldest tradition are minimal and sporadic attestations in several very limited fragments (transcriptions from memory, some of which completed during the poet's lifetime), the most substantial of which contain the verses from *Inf.* V 1-23 transcribed in a *Registro* dated 1319 and from *Purg.* XI 1-24 in a *Memoriale* dated 1327: the *Memoriali* and *Registri* of Bologna notaries, conserved in the city's Archivio di Stato (*Bo*), are famous.

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[5] See CIOCIOLA (2001, 174-76, with former bibliography). It's useful to see also MALATO (2004, 91-106).

[6] Ms. Aldina AP XVI 25, on which see PETROCCHI (1966-1967, vol. I, 76-78). For a recent description, also see ROMANINI (2007a, 55f.).

[7] On this subject, see VANDELLI (1922, 111-44). See also the remarks made by SAVINO (2000, 6); and BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004, 65f.).

[8] For general statistics, see GUIDI (2007, 215-28). Guidi based his analysis on the data presented by BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004, 109f.). He distinguishes and quantifies the manuscript production over three periods: 83 mss. belong to the first one (1321-1350); 210 mss. are due to the second period (1351-1400); 439 mss. dated back to the third period (1401-1500), for a total amount of 732 manuscripts. However, Guidi suggests some interesting remarks also on the lost materials, estimating a loss exceeding 70 per cent (GUIDI, 2007, 224).

1. Early circulation of Dante's masterpiece

Since Dante's autograph manuscripts have been lost, as have the first copies of the entire Poem following his death, the oldest complete witness in our possession is the famous Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Ashburnham 828, known to Giorgio Petrocchi as *Ash* (**Table 1**), not surprisingly known as the "Antichissimo" ('very ancient'), for obvious reason, given that it is dated before 1335: then, since the manuscript is of Pisan linguistic origin, it should be dated with reference to the common style, i.e. dating back a

Tab. 1. Ash, f. 35r

year to 1334. Consequently, we are chronologically very close to the two famous manuscripts mentioned here, forcing us to note that by the late 1320s or, at most, the early 1330s the definitive version of the *Comedy* circulated not only in the Pisan area but also around Florence.

There were two copyists who worked at the current version of *Ash*, both writing in *littera textualis*: the first was responsible for the text of the *Comedy* (fols. 1rA-102rB); the other, who also signed the codex (on fol. 104rB, where we find: «d'ogosto MCCCXXXV»: August 1335), copied the *Capitolo* by Iacopo Alighieri (fols. 103rA-104rA)[9]. It is noteworthy that the two copyists were contemporary, but they came from the same atelier as well, working side by side, as demonstrated by both a historical-philological analysis, and by codicological-palaeographical study.[10] Briefly, the oldest extant copy of the *Comedy* (written shortly before August 1334) is a manuscript that associates the text of the Poem with that of Iacopo Alighieri's *Capitolo*, and it was thus planned, organized and completed as a codex. From a codicological standpoint, it is a parchment manuscript in a medium-large format (311 × 232 mm.), with the text of the *Comedy* and Iacopo's *Capitolo* arranged in two columns, written in *littera textualis* and with a rather austere decorative apparatus composed of simple pen-flourished initials, which differ when they are in *cantiche* or cantos, with all the other typical decorative motives distinguishing Gothic manuscripts: red rubrics, red and blue paragraph signs, majuscules with yellow or red touches.

Notwithstanding its antiquity and authoritativeness, the model book represented by *Ash* was not very successful, nor did it leave a clear and decisive mark on the rest of the manuscript tradition of the *Comedy*, at least judging from the extant fourteenth codices: of about 300 manuscripts dated to the 14th century (out of a total of more than 800)[11], in fact, *ca.* thirty of them at most share *Ash*'s macroscopic formal characteristics (such as medium-large format, the two columns *mise en page*, and the script), that is barely 10%. This fact is quite surprising, as the formal aspects of the extremely old *Ash* codex are also the most frequent in Italian vernacular manuscript production of the early 14th century[12]. In short, it is the formal layout that best follows tradition and best identifies the book as a "container", even if concerning the text of the *Comedy* it evidently does not fit with the requirements of the patrons. If we consider a fourth parameter, in addition to

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[9] On *Ash* and its updated description, see BERTELLI (2011a, 346f. n. 13, fig. 16).

[10] As shown by BERTELLI (2011a, 38-40).

[11] An overview essay on the 13th century manuscripts is BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004); on generale statistics, see also GUIDI (2007, 215-28).

[12] See on this regard my two volumes BERTELLI (2002, 27-31; and 2011b, 23-28).

the above-mentioned formal characteristics, that is to say, the presence of another text in connection to that of the *Comedy*, i.e. Iacopo's *Capitolo*[13], we should note that among the thirty or so copies, only four manuscripts were influenced by this book type, namely ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 203 (*Ham*), copied in 1347 by Tommaso Benetti da Lucca[14]; the ms. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 40.11, dated to the fifth decade of the 14th century[15]; the ms. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Palatino 319, also *grosso modo* coeval to the Laurentian manuscript [16]; and a codex still underestimated by the most recent studies, but surely datable to the second quarter or not later than the mid-14th century, that is the exceptional manuscript Padua, Biblioteca del Seminario vescovile, codex no. 2 (**Table 2**)[17]. Like *Ash*, all four of these manuscripts contain, besides the text of the *Comedy*, either Iacopo Alighieri's *Capitolo* alone (as in the case of the Berlin ms.), or Iacopo's *Capitolo* together with that of Bosone da Gubbio (as is the case with the other three).

Tab. 2. Padova, Bibl. Seminario, Ms. 2, f. 1r

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[13] On Iacopo Alighieri's *Capitolo*, see GIUNTI (2007, 583-610).

[14] Described by PETROCCHI (1966-1967, vol. I, 68f.) and RODDEWIG (1984, 9-10 n. 15, fig. 5, the *colophon* and copyst's sign are reproduced).

[15] Described by BERTELLI (2011a, 327f. n. 1, fig. 1, with former bibliography).

[16] See BERTELLI (2011a, 377f. n. 32, fig. 38, with former bibliography).

[17] Described by RODDEWIG (1984, 227 n. 532).

The structure of the contents is certainly not random, but was instead intentionally studied by copyists and thus patrons, above all during this period (the first half of the 14th century): not only because the arguments obviously coincide, but also due to the complementarity of their intentions and treatment. In fact, while Iacopo Alighieri aims at concisely exposing the main structure, the content of his father's work, Bosone da Gubbio describes the meaning of some of the principal allegories of the *Comedy* episodically (for example, he discusses the significance of the tree beasts, or the figures of Virgil and Beatrix, and so on). This is why the two *Capitoli* are often paired in Dantesque manuscripts, thus representing a sort of 'framework' for the *Comedy.*

Nevertheless, in the four manuscripts we have mentioned, we can also note a macroscopic difference with respect to the model they follow: the level of the decorative work. As already noted, although in *Ash* the decorative apparatus is rather plain, in the four manuscripts it is of a rather higher level; as a matter of fact, at the topical points of the text (the initials of the *cantiche* in the Poem, the initials of the *Capitoli*, but also in the large space next to them) there is a relevant decoration executed by brush, with ornate initials and the presence of gold (and in the Paduan ms. – preserved in the library of the earl Alfonso Speroni Alvarotti – there is also a series of other illuminations running along the lower margin of the codex)[18]. It is evident that this is a different phase in the manuscript production of the Poem and, henceforth, of Dante's text. In other words, from a chronological point of view, only a few years passed between the first and the others, a decade at most. But these were the years in which the demand, the speed of transmission and geographical circulation of the *Comedy* was extraordinary. In this dynamic process – carried out by ateliers, where individuals with different specializations operated, and a bustling book market – the approach to the Poem had obviously changed, while the patrons' tastes also evolved, following very closely the trend of the time from a formal, aesthetic standpoint. The tendency of the moment was oriented towards that type of decoration at certain parts of the manuscript.

Moreover, there are at least two other book type of the *Comedy* from the early 14th century that are certainly worth examining, because they are well represented in the manuscript tradition of the Poem. The first of these refers to the appearance of the so-called "Danti del Cento" (literally, 'Dante's hundreds manuscripts')[19].

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[18] On the figurative aspects of this important Paduan manuscript, see MARIANI CANOVA (1997, 151-77, at p. 160).

[19] See at least BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004, 77-93, with further bibliography).

The "Danti del Cento"

The definition of "Danti del Cento" is not an issue to be addressed here, as there are well-known anecdotes by Vincenzio Borghini (1515-1580) and by some other 15th century annotations within a small group of Florentine manuscripts[20]. For the purposes of this paper, it must instead determine at least those codicological features, representing the huge group of manuscripts realized in the "Cento style".

First of all, it consists of about 70 codices which share the following characteristics: a medium-large format (350/400 mm. *ca.* high and 250 mm. wide); parchment support; a length of approximately 90 fols.; the *mise en page*, i.e. the layout of the text into two columns with the tercet initials extending into the margins; the prevalent use of the so-called caesura among the *cantiche* (that is to say, the presence of a break among the *cantiche*, marked by blank pages); a high-level decorative apparatus (with quite standard images, such as Dante in the dark wood in the *Inferno*; Dante and Virgil on the boat in the *Purgatorio*; and Dante and Beatrix in the *Paradiso*, otherwise Christ in Glory); finally, a bastard secretary hand in the script[21].

Among others, only two manuscripts have the date and signature expressly indicated: the codex Trivulziano 1080 (*Triv*; see **Table 3**)[22] and Laurenziano Plut. 90 sup. 125 (*Ga*)[23], both written by the same copyist, Francesco di ser Nardo da Barberino, who executed them in Florence, respectively the former in 1337, and the latter between September 1347 and March 1348[24]. These two important manuscripts, as well as all the other manuscripts

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[20] It is worth remembering that in his *Lettera intorno a' manoscritti antichi* ['Letter on ancient manuscripts'], Borghini wrote: «gli scrittori di que' tempi furono per la maggior parte persone che ne teneano bottega aperta, et vivevano di scrivere i libri a prezzo, et si conta d'uno che con cento Danti ch'egli scrisse maritò non so quante sue figliuole, et di questo se ne trova ancora qualchuno, che si chiamano di que' *del cento*, et sono ragionevoli ma non però ottimi» ["writers were once for the most part people who had open ateliers, writing books in order to be paid; among them, there was one who married a lot of daughters by selling hundreds of Dante's books. It is still possible to find some of these manuscripts, called '*del cento*', that are fine copies, but not the best ones"]. See BELLONI (1995, 21).

[21] On the terminological question, see at least CASAMASSIMA (1988, 98f.); DE ROBERTIS BONIFORTI (1997, 58f.); and ZAMPONI (1997, 485-87).

[22] The decorative apparatus is due to the ability of the so-called Maestro delle Effigi Domenicane (a misterious painter and miniaturist, active in Florence in the 1330s-1340s), on which see KANTER (2004, 560-62). For a description of the codex, see RODDEWIG (1984, 189-90 n. 451). Also note that a spectacular facsimile edition of this manuscript was issued in the occasion of the 7th centenary of Dante's death, on which see ROCCA (1921).

[23] Recently described by BERTELLI (2011b, 64-66 n. 34, figg. 52-53; and 2011a, 339-42 n. 9, figure 12, with former bibliography).

[24] For a profile and a study of the production of the renowned copyist from Barberino Val d'Elsa (a town near to Poggibonsi, not very far from Florence, in the province of Siena), see BERTELLI (2003, 408-21), where there is a description both of the signed manuscripts and of those attributable to him (included a fragment now preserved at Genève, Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Comites Latentes 316, actually produced

of the same group, allow us to identify both the place of production of the entire group of the Cento codices in the Florentine area, and to date them within a chronological range, going from 1330s and 1340s *circa.*

Tab. 3. Triv, f. 1r

The group of the "Danti del Cento" is characterized by anonym copyists and by an extraordinary uniformity in the script, so that it is often difficult to distinguish one copyist from another. Only recently, research by Gabriella Pomaro and Marisa Boschi Rotiroti shed light on the various attributions, identifying the scripts of as many as seven different scribes. These are defined as follows (in alphabetical order)[25]: the «copyist of

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by the so-called «main copyist of the Cento», as demonstrated by Bertelli (2007b, 9-33; and 2006, 77-90), on the analysis of his production and with the description of a new codex, the ms. Roma, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Vittorio Emanuele 1189, containing the text *Vite dei Santi Padri*, in the vernacular version of Domenico Cavalca, to which our copyist devoted himself during the 1330s.

[25] See in particular Pomaro (1986, 343-74; 1994a; 1994b, 193-213; 1995, 497-536); and Boschi Rotiroti (2004, 78).

App» (Florence, BML, Ashburnham Appendice dantesca 1); the «copyist of *Ashb*» (Florence, BML, Ashburnham 829); the «copyist of *Lau*» (Florence, BML, Plut. 40.16); the «copyist of *Parm*» (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Parmense 3285); the «copyist of *Pr*» (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ital. 539); and the «copyist of *Vat*» (Vatican City, BAV, Vat. lat. 3199); to whom must be added the much more prolific «main copyist of the Cento»[26].

Out of about 70 manuscripts, those which are more interesting to us – as they contain, besides the *Comedy*, other texts too – there are around 19 (just over 20%), in which the *Capitolo* in tercet by Iacopo Alighieri, otherwise the *Capitolo* by Bosone da Gubbio, sometimes together with the *Capitolo* by Iacopo, is preserved[27]. It is important to note that these texts are almost always an appendix to the Poem (they are rarely at the beginning of the manuscript). Obviously, these texts are ancillary works to the *Comedy*, having the purpose of supporting the Poem as brief and sporadic explanations to single issues or allegorical-symbolical aspects of Dante's text. In short, their importance in the framework of the book project is certainly subordinate; in fact, also from a material viewpoint, their transcription extends to maximum 5 or 6 fols.

An exception is the manuscript preserved in Bruxelles, Bibliotèque Royale Albert Ier, 14614-14615 and 14616, containing another small work, the *Tesoretto* by Brunetto Latini, besides the *Comedy* and the *Capitoli*, in tercet by Iacopo and Bosone da Gubbio[28]. Three copyists worked on writing this manuscript: the early two *cantiche*, the beginning of the third *cantica* and the final *Tesoretto* (this one exceptionally arranged in three columns, these are fols. 1rA-65rB and 95rA-106rA) are work of the first amanuensis, who writes in a bastard secretary hand ("Cento style"), a harmonious and regular script; in the *Paradiso*, some cantos (from V onwards, or fols. 65rB-76vA) are by another copyist, having a bastard secretary hand that is more artificial and calligraphic, which is followed, from the XVIII canto onwards including the two *Capitoli* (or fols. 76vB-93rB),

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[26] For an overview on these copyists and a palaeographical analysis of the different handwritings, see BERTELLI (2011a, 48-129).

[27] The manuscripts are: Belluno, Biblioteca Lolliniana, 35 (signed *Lo*); Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 202; Berlin, Staatsbibl., Hamilton 203 (*Ham*); Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, 14614-15-16; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chig. L.V.167; Vatican City, BAV, Urb. lat. 378; Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pl. 90 sup. 127; Florence, BML, Ashb. App. dant. 1; Florence, BML, Strozzi 149; Florence, BML, Strozzi 151; Florence, BML, Strozzi 152; Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.I.32; Florence, BNC, Conv. Soppr. C.III.1262; Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 1025; Florence, BR, 1033; Holkham Hall, Library of the Earl of Leicester, 513; Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, 1080 (*Triv*); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ital. 528; and Paris, BnF, Ital. 529.

[28] For a description of the codex, see RODDEWIG (2004, 25 n. 51). A brief description and other information in BOLTON HOLLOWAY (1986, 17).

by the elegant and distinctive hand of the so-called "copyist of *Parm*" (identifying manuscript 3285 of the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, see **Table** 4). It is clearly an atelier product, but not an atelier at all! Due to graphic skilfulness and to dating (there are documents of the years 1334-1339, attesting his activity), the "copyist of *Parm*" is undoubtedly one of the most relevant interpreters of the writing embodying the style known as "del Cento". To his authorship other manuscripts are also attributable, besides the ms. Parmense 3285, such as the fragments 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 at the Archivio di Stato in Bologna and a part of the ms. Riccardiano 1025 (fols. 84vA-88rB), both containing the *Comedy*; some *Statuti* preserved at the Archivio di Stato in Florence[29]; lastly, the ms. Riccardiano 1578, with the vernacular version of Ovidius' *Epistolae* by Filippo Ceffi[30].

Tab. 4. Parm, f. 1r

The handwriting style of the "copyist of *Parm*", one of the most refined scribes of the *Comedy* in the early 14th century, distinguishes itself from the several other contemporary copyists due to its overwhelming tendency to the *variatio*, in particular

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[29] It is, in particular: *Statuti del Podestà*, Ms. 7; *Statuti dell'Arte di Calimala*, Ms. 4 and Ms. 5; and *Statuti dei Capitani di Parte Guelfa*, red nos. 2, on which see POMARO (2007, 243-79).

[30] See BERTELLI (2011a, 75-78).

when carrying out the letters *d* (**Figure 1**) and *g* (**Figure 2**), more generally emphasizing crossbars and loops (**Figures 3-4**). From a morphological standpoint, a distinctive aspect of the handwriting style of this copyist is the recurrent letter *g*, showing a rather flattened loop, which is very stretched and inclining to be horizontal; or the double *çç* (**Figure 5**), whose cedilla is formed by a unique stroke going down from the left letter to the right one in a flowing shape, going up after executing a double loop. The execution in two phases of a straight letter *r* (**Figure 6**) is also noteworthy, whose first stroke is often extended below the writing line, which is a clear indication of high graphic expertise and uncommon professionalism. The majuscule alphabet is also very characteristic (**Figure 10**).
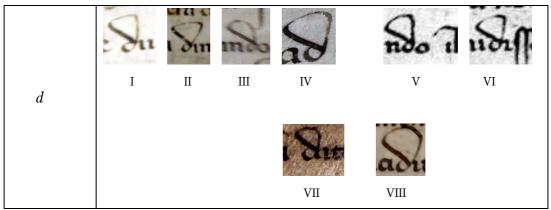

Fig. 1. Samples from I-IV in Parm. 3285; V-VI in Ricc. 1025; VII in ASBo Framm. 6; VIII in Marciano Lat. VI 167
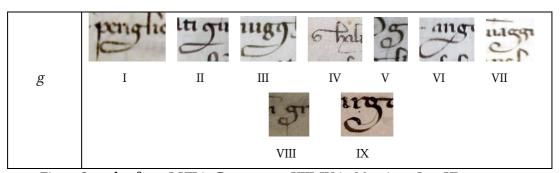

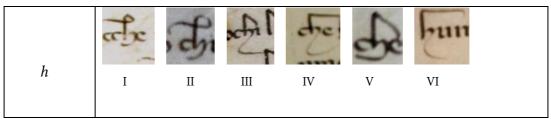**Fig. 2. Samples from I-VII in Parm. 3285; VIII-IX in Marciano Lat. VI 167**

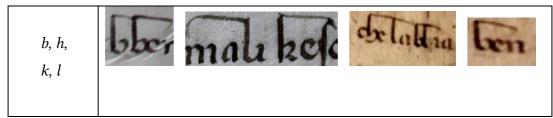**Fig. 3. Samples from I-V in Parm. 3285; VI in Marciano Lat. VI 167**

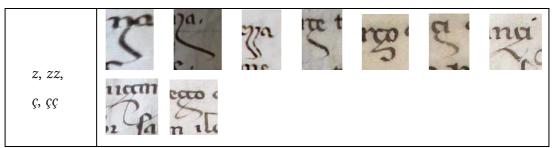|	
b, h, *k, l*	

Fig. 4. Samples in Parm. 3285

z, zz, *ç, çç*	

Fig. 5. Samples in Parm. 3285

r, x, v	

Fig. 6. Samples in Parm. 3285

tironian sign *et*	
	I II III IV V

Fig. 7. Samples from I-IV in Parm. 3285; V in Marciano Lat. VI.167
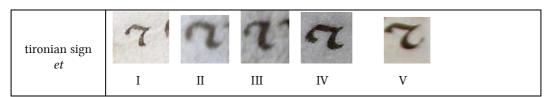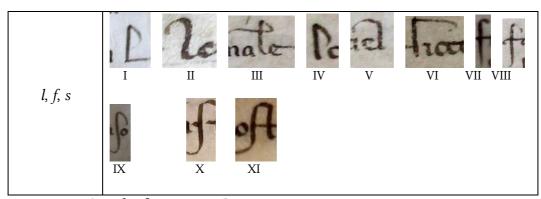
l, f, s	

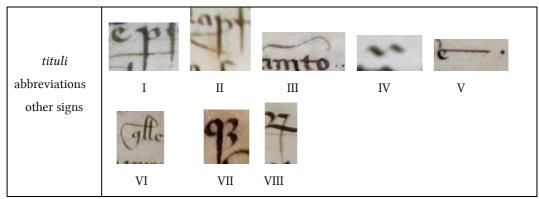**Fig. 8. Samples from I-IX in Parm. 3285; X-XI in Marciano Lat. VI.167**

Fig. 9. Samples from I-VI in Parm. **3285; VII-VIII in Marciano Lat. VI.167**

Fig. 10. Samples from I-XI in Parm. **3285**

Before examining the other type of manuscript surveyed in this research, it is also worth noting another aspect, that is probably not so obvious, but quite curious and interesting to observe. Among the 19 manuscripts, related to the book type of the "Danti del Cento", there is the ancestor manuscript of the group too, i.e. the model from which all the others originate, this is ms. Trivulziano 1080 (*Triv*), containing the *Capitoli* by Iacopo Alighieri and Bosone da Gubbio. Adding to these manuscripts the codex 190 of the Biblioteca Passerini-Landi in Piacenza (*La*), copied in Genoa by Antonio da Fermo in 1336, which is not a manuscript belonging to the "Danti del Cento", but is similar to the codices of this group, one might observe that the three most ancient manuscripts of the *Comedy* (*Ash*, dated *ante* 1334; *La*, dated 1336 and *Triv*, dated 1337) are three miscellaneous codices, thus containing besides the Poem, also the *Capitoli* by Iacopo Alighieri and Bosone da Gubbio. As anticipated above, this is not accidental: in our opinion, at that time the need was probably strongly felt to harmonize the Poem with some other texts as support, in order to assist a not especially easy or difficult comprehension of Dante's *Comedy*. The *Capitoli* by Iacopo and Bosone were apparently the most immediate instruments suitable to the purposes prescribed by material requirements, being both short and readily available.

The one column manuscripts in 'littera textualis'

Another well-documented book type from the early 14th century is the one presenting the text of the Poem in a single column, positioned more or less in the centre of the page, albeit still requiring much work. As is known, the oldest manuscript tradition of Dante's Poem includes codices without any chronological reference[31], hence the palaeographers often disagree[32], deciding – *recta via* – the inclusion/exclusion of a manuscript in the *corpus* of the *antiquiores.* This attitude is particularly evident and significant in relation to the *Comedies* written in *littera textualis.* In this respect, there still seems to be a sort of prejudice, according to which the manuscripts belonging to this book type are considered *a priori* by scholars antecedent exemplars in comparison to those written in cursive (namely a bastard secretary script), above all when they display a one column *mise en page,* with the text placed more or less at the centre of the page[33]. Then, with the same condition, or better with the same formal aspects, and with only the graphic features changing, there is a propensity to date back a manuscript written by a bastard secretary hand, earlier than a manuscript copied in *littera textualis.* This sort of attitude can be explained by two main reasons: the first is to be assigned to an objective difficulty of assessing this type of script, showing a fairly linear trend over time during the period concerned (and then displaying no morphological evolutions, such as to make a chronological stratification of the exemplars, based on the exclusive graphic issue available[34]; this feature is instead achievable in the cursive script[35]); while the second reason, playing a rather negative role for certain manuscripts, is probably due to the presence both of two very important manuscripts of the old vernacular tradition, like *Urb* (dated 1352; or Vaticano lat. 366, the *optimus* according to Federico Sanguineti) and

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[31] The situation will be quite different in the 15th century, at least concerning the manuscripts of the *Commedia* in humanistic script, that included a rather high percentage of dated books. In fact, 28 surveyed units of 81 (that is 34,57% of the total) have at least one useful element that allows dating of the manuscript (see Bertelli, 2007a, 22f.). Significant results come from the survey by Guidi (2007, 219-21), where the percentage of the dated mss. (14th-15th centuries) is divided as follows: 9,6% the mss. comprised between the years 1321-1350 (8 dated mss. of 83 mss.); 16,2% the codices of the years 1351-1400 (34 dated mss. of 210 mss.); and 21,4% the mss. of the years 1401-1500 (94 dated mss. of 439 mss.).

[32] As observed, for example, also in Pomaro (1994b, 195); (2003, 283); and in Bertelli (2007b, 15f.).

[33] For an overview on this issue, i.e. on the *Commedie* in *littera textualis,* see Boschi Rotiroti (2004, 99-105).

[34] On this aspect, see the recent observations by De Robertis (2001, 339). However Casamassima (1988, 95-130), must be seen, where there is a specific examination of the structural aspects and functioning of the *littera textualis.*

[35] Especially thanks to the comparison with the (few) dated manuscripts of the Poem, extant in this graphic form (the ones included in the period concerned, of course): *La* (year 1336); *Triv* (1337); *Ham* (1347); *Ga* (1347-1348); and *Mad* (1354).

Laur (dated 1355, or Laurenziano Plut. 40.22) and, maybe mostly, of the focused influence of the three Boccaccio manuscripts *To, Ri* and *Chig*, acting as turning points in the old vernacular tradition (this is the case of ms. Toledano Zelada 104.6), dating back *grosso modo* to a period anterior to the end of the 1350s[36]. These manuscripts display a specific physiognomy of the *Comedy*, determining consequently an almost normal forward movement of dating for this type of book. The manuscripts belonging to this type of codices are different: besides *Urb, Laur* and *To*, there are, for example, a pair of manuscripts from Bologna, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, A.321 and ms. 589 from Biblioteca Universitaria, but also Vaticano Barberiniano Lat. 4117.

The codex preserved in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, namely Rehdiger 227 (**Table 5**), also belongs to the same group, dated by Roddewig to the second half of the 14th century, and to the last quarter of the century by Boschi Rotiroti[37]; it contains the whole *Comedy* and, in the final part, the *Capitoli* by Bosone da Gubbio and Iacopo Alighieri[38]. It is a parchment codex, measuring *ca.* 280 × 230 mm, and quite voluminous (173 fols.); the layout of the text is in two columns with the tercet initials extending into the margins with decorated initials of the *cantiche* (fols. 2r, 57r and 115r)[39]. The script is a formal *littera textualis* by the hand of only one copyist, certainly coming from the Florentine area[40], displaying a definitely archaic *conspectus*. The amanuensis shows clear attention to graphic technique, to absolute respect for the rules regulating this type of script, characterized, moreover, by an almost systematic presence of the letter *k* instead of *ch*: this is a distinctive sign of the oldest Tuscan texts (if not specifically of the Florentine ones) dating back to the early literature of the Origins[41]. The frequency of this feature in the manuscript, and the regularity of execution, cannot derive from an ancestor codex, but is a spontaneous consequence of the training and handwriting education of the copyist. Henceforth, it is a Florentine copyist of the first half of the 14th century; an amanuensis clearly trained at working with this script, furthermore a

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[36] On the dating of the Boccaccio vernacular autographs, see at least BERTELLI (2014).

[37] See RODDEWIG (1984, 13-14 n. 22); and BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004, 110 n. 11).

[38] A short descriptive file also by ROMANINI (2007b, 89f.), who confirms the dating by Boschi Rotiroti.

[39] Edited in PASUT (2006a, 379-409, figg. 14, 15, 16 and 17). For a more detailed comment of these decorations, see PASUT (2008, 51-55 and figg. 20, 22 and 24). For the author, the Berlin manuscript represents probably the oldest illuminated edition of the Poem by the Maestro delle Effigi Domenicane, dated to 1330 *circa*. On the figure and artistic activity of this miniaturist, see KANTER (2004, 560-62).

[40] In this sense, see also CONTINI (1966, 341).

[41] This well-known feature was noted since the precious notes *Appunti sulla grafia* (at p. 264) at the end of the useful study by SCHIAFFINI (1954²). See also the remarks by CASTELLANI (1952, vol. I, 17f.). Several examples of the Tuscan use (but not only) should also be found in the tables published by BERTELLI (2002 and 2011b).

professional who works in collaboration with a great expert in the *ars miniandi*, the so-
called Maestro delle Effigi Domenicane, who was likewise the author of the entire
decorative apparatus of the codex [42]. As is well known, the Maestro delle Effigi
Domenicane also realized the iconographic cycle of at least two other relevant and most
famous *Commedie*: *Triv*, copied and signed in 1337 by Francesco di ser Nardo da
Barberino[43]; and *Parm*, attributed by Pomaro to the same period as Trivulziano 1080, or
at least datable to the 1330s[44]. Moreover, the last dated work of the same Maestro is an
altarpiece dating back to 1345 (coming from the church of San Paolino in Florence, now
preserved at the Courtauld Institute of Art Galleries, inv. no. 69, in London)[45].

Tab. 5. Berlin, Rehd. 227, f. 2r

Also taking into consideration the palaeographical observations mentioned above, the
authorship of the decorative apparatus of the Berlin codex by hand of the Maestro delle

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[42] The authorship of the iconographic apparatus of the Berlin ms. to this relevant miniaturist of the
Commedia is due to Pasut, who presented her research in the following papers: PASUT (2006a, 405-409 and
figg.; 2006b, 125f. and n. 39; and 2008, 51-56 and figg. See also ZANICHELLI (2006, 130f. n. 53).

[43] For a description of *Triv*, see BERTELLI (2003, 415f. n. 4 and fig. 4, with former bibliography). Short
descriptive files are given also by BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004, 134 n. 198); and by ROMANINI (2007a, 59).

[44] A description of *Parm*, besides PETROCCHI (1966-1967, vol. I, 80), and RODDEWIG (1984, 255 n. 591); see
also POMARO (1994a, 57 and n. 19); BOSCHI ROTIROTI (2004, 138 n. 234); and ROMANINI (2007a, 56f.).

[45] See KANTER (2004, 561).

Effigi Domenicane necessarily requires dating the manuscript from the second quarter of the 14th century. Hence, this manuscript might be ascribed – at least from a palaeographic standpoint – to a respectful place in the earlier circulation process of Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

It is very interesting also the case of the Laurentian Plut. 40.3 (**Table 6**). The codex, probably from Siena in origin, was executed around the mid-14th century and, in any case, before 1363. In fact, the magnificent illustrative apparatus of this codex has been attributed to Niccolò di ser Sozzo, a Sienese painter and illuminator active in Siena around that time[46]. Two other works, both of the highest quality, have confidently been ascribed to him: the miniature with the *Assumption* in the so-called Caleffo dell'Assunta

Tab. 6. Firenze, BML, Plut. 40.3, f. 83r

(register of contracts), now at the Archivio di Stato in Siena, and the polyptych of the *Madonna, Angels and Saints* (*ca.* 1362; Siena, Pinacoteca) executed with Luca di Tommè (Siena, *ca.* 1330-after 1389). These works show that he was a follower of Simone Martini

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[46] See FREULER (2004, 823-26).

and Pietro Lorenzetti, but was more attentive to a refined and precious decorative approach. Based on these works, various others have been associated with the artist, including – in addition to ours – several illuminated codices now at the Museo d'Arte Sacra in San Gimignano (Siena). The great prestige and renown likely enjoyed by Niccolò di ser Sozzo can fully be appreciated in the illuminations of this Laurentian codex, in which he successfully imparts extraordinary vivacity and lightness to the illustrated scene. For example, we can observe this in the execution of the little boat of Dante's intellect (on fol. 83r), in which the vessel is propelled by more favourable and benevolent winds through the device of the sail extending outside the frame around the illumination.

On the sidelines, but extremely important for the history and reconstruction of Dante's text, there are several isolated manuscripts, probably from Florence, that cannot be classified as part of a serial production of codices, such as Palatino 313 at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence (*Po*), ms. CF 2.16 at the Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini in Naples (*Fi*) and Egerton 943 at the British Library (*Eg*). All three can be ascribed to the second quarter of the 14th century and are richly illuminated (particularly the London codex, composed of nearly 190 medium-large parchment folios accompanied by 253 illustrations)[47].

Yet the history of Dante's masterpiece is not Florentine alone. There is the provincial manuscript production (particularly in areas to the north) – not as extensive, but less contaminated – handed down to us by exemplars that are quite noteworthy in terms of quality and antiquity. We need merely consider Landiano 190 at the Biblioteca Passerini-Landi di Piacenza (*La*), transcribed in Genova in 1336 by a Marchigian copyist, Antonio da Fermo, commissioned by the *podestà* Beccario Beccaria; the famous Riccardiano-Braidense (*Rb*), copied around the 1340s by the Bolognese master Galvano (an exceptional exemplar of the *Comedy* with comments arranged as a frame by Iacopo della Lana)[48], a unique manuscript but conserved separately (the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are in Riccardiano 1005, while the *Paradiso* is in ms. AG.XII.2 at the Biblioteca Braidense in

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[47] On the three mss., very important and very known not only from an iconographic standpoint, see the facsimile editions *La* Commedia *di Dante Alighieri (ripr. del ms. Pal. 313 della Bibl. Nazionale Centrale di Firenze)*, Firenze 2013, as well as *Il codice Filippino della* Commedia *di Dante Alighieri (ed. integrale in fac-simile nel formato originale del ms. CF 2 16 già 4 20 della Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini di Napoli)*, Roma 2001; and, more recently, PEGORETTI (2014).

[48] On the importance of which, see VOLPI (2010). On this subject, by the same author, see at least VOLPI (2013, 47-70).

Milan)[49]; and Vaticano Urbinate Lat. 366 (*Urb*), already mentioned, written in the Emilia-Romagna area in 1352 and used as a reference manuscript for the recent edition of the Poem curated by Federico Sanguineti[50].

Nevertheless, an overview of the production and circulation of the *Comedy*, above all with regard to early-14th century Florence, must naturally touch on what has been dubbed the "*Vat* workshop", in reference to the famous ms. Vaticano Lat. 3199 (*Vat*), thought to be the manuscript Giovanni Boccaccio gave to his friend and teacher Francesco Petrarca between the summer of 1351 and May 1353[51]. In fact, six other codices have been attributed to his learned copyist. In terms of importance and artistic quality, the most noteworthy of these are ms. 597 at the Musée Condé in Chantilly (a marvellous dedicatory manuscript made for the Genoese nobleman Lucano Spinola, containing only the *Inferno* with a commentary by Guido da Pisa) and the Laurentian Plut. 40.13, both of which have important illustrative cycles attributed respectively to the Pisan painter Francesco Traini (active in Pisa between around 1315 and 1348) and the so-called Master of the Dominican Effigies, likewise a painter and illuminator but with a mysterious background active in Florence in the second quarter of the 14th century[52].

What is striking in Plut. 40.13 is the great attention the illuminator lavished on details, particularly for the execution of the initial of the *Purgatorio* (on fol. 25r), in which the sallow complexions, with very subtle and careful heightening, and the cruciform motif on the boat show very close parallels with those executed by the same master for the initial of the second *cantica* (fol. 36r) in the Trivulziano 1080 codex (*Triv*), dated 1337. Thus, these are products of the finest quality in which artisans with different areas of expertise came together and collaborated: not only professional copyists and illuminators, but also stationers and merchants who sold writing supports (reams of paper, parchments of different qualities and sizes) and ink, bookbinders and ordinary

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[49] For a recent description of the two mss., see BERTELLI (2011a, 381-84 n. 34 and fig. 40); DE ROBERTIS – MIRIELLO (1999, 45f. n. 81 and figg. 100-102: Riccardiano 1005); and GROSSI TURCHETTI (2004, 48 n. 75, fig. 71: Braidense AG.XII.2). Also to *Rb* has been recently dedicated a facsimile edition entitled *La* Commedia, *con il commento di Iacomo della Lana, nel ms. Riccardiano-Braidense*, Roma 2007 (= «Edizione Nazionale dei Commenti danteschi» III).

[50] See SANGUINETI (2001).

[51] On this subject, see POMARO (1986, 343-74). On the copyist and his work, see also BERTELLI (2011a, 80-83 n. 10); BRESCHI (2014, 95-117); BETTARINI – BRESCHI – TANTURLI (2015); and DE ROBERTIS (2015, 148, 152, 155, 159, 163f.).

[52] For a detailed analysis of the miniatures and the various attributions, see PASUT (2006b, 115-47; 2009, vol. I, 184). On the decorative apparatus of *Cha*, see BRIEGER – MEISS – SINGLETON (1969, vol. I, 31-80); BATTAGLIA RICCI (1994, 41-43, 46); MULAS (2005, 2-73); BALBARINI (2003, 497-512; 2004, 374-84; 2011); and BATTAGLIA RICCI (2008, 83-100, with former bibliography).

people, all of whom undisputedly played a leading role in the very fortunate season so propitious for Dante's *Comedy*, above all in Florence.

2. The second half of the 14ᵗʰ century

The beginning of the 'publishing' activity of Giovanni Boccaccio, the greatest 14ᵗʰ century expert and admirer of Dante Alighieri and his work, has traditionally been dated to the mid-1350s[53].

We know of many of Boccaccio's autograph manuscripts (seventeen in all, but we must also add twelve annotated manuscripts, one of which discovered only recently, and a letter in the vernacular). Three of these manuscripts hand down the text of the *Comedy* and, in chronological order (from the oldest to the most recent), they are: the Toledano Zelada 104.6 (*To*), the Riccardiano 1035 (*Ri*) and the Vaticano Chigiano L.VI.213 (*Chig*), in which, in addition to the text of the Poem, Boccaccio repeatedly practised writing and studying Dante's works, with extraordinary results above all regarding the tradition of the text of the *Vita nuova* and that of the *Rime*. As has amply been demonstrated, the three autograph copies present significant textual variations, which have led recent scholarship to consider the Chigiano to be the last and definitive exemplar of Dante's work[54].

Further testimony of Boccaccio's ardent admiration for Dante comes from his *Trattatello in laude* written in honour of the beloved poet (more simply known as *Vita di Dante*). It has been handed down to us in two autograph versions, a longer one (in the autograph Toledano) and a shorter one (in autograph Chigiano), to which a third one was also added, likewise abridged (and extensively attested to in codices), but to a lesser extent with respect to the one handed down by the autograph version now in the Vatican manuscript[55]. Thus, it is no accident that the *Trattatello* has pride of place in the two autograph works – the Toledano and the Chigiano – in which Boccaccio's short work opens the volume, and this should be interpreted as a sign of great respect and admiration for Dante and his work.

Boccaccio's voracious and detailed study of the *Comedy* inspired him to introduce the start of each *cantica* in each of the autograph works with chapters in *terza rima*, in

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[53] The bibliography on the subject is wide, for which see at least BERTELLI-CAPPI (2014, with former bibliography).

[54] On the sequence *To > Ri > Chig*, see PETROCCHI (1966-1967, vol. I, 18f.); and at least MECCA (2013a, 119).

[55] On this subject, see CAPPI – GIOLA (2014, 245-325).

which he summarizes the contents of the entire Poem concisely but attentively and in great detail. This is the so-called *Brieve raccoglimento* (or simply *Argomenti*), very common in the manuscripts (as demonstrated, for example, by the Laurentian Ashburnham Appendice Dantesca 6, executed in Florence in the second half of the 15th century) in which Boccaccio establishes the Poem's ultramundane geography (such as rivers, skies, the 'cold' paths of *Ptolomaea* and the 'strange' ones of the mountain of Purgatory), dwelling on the various figures that the pilgrim Dante encounters and observes during his profound knowledge and faithfulness to Dante's words that Boccaccio – elderly by this time and a renowned intellectual – was commissioned by the Priors of the Arts and the Gonfalonier of Justice of Florence to hold the first public reading of the Poem[56].

The *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia* commenced on Sunday 23 October 1373, in the little church of Santo Stefano di Badia, across from the Bargello, where Dante (according to what he said in the *Vita nuova*) first saw Beatrice Portinari. The readings continued until January 1374, when they stopped abruptly (at *Inf.* XVII 17) due to the outbreak of another plague in the city as well as Boccaccio's failing health. The work consists of an extensive and in-depth *accessus ad auctorem*, for which Boccaccio turned to the famous and hotly debated *Epistola a Cangrande della Scala* and the preceding biography of Dante[57]. The work was extraordinarily successful, also among contemporaries (the audience of the public readings included the likes of Benvenuto da Imola, author of the monumental *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*); at the same time, the *Esposizioni* were a key source for other commentators on Dante, such as Francesco da Buti, Filippo Villani, Guiniforte Barzizza and Cristoforo Landino.
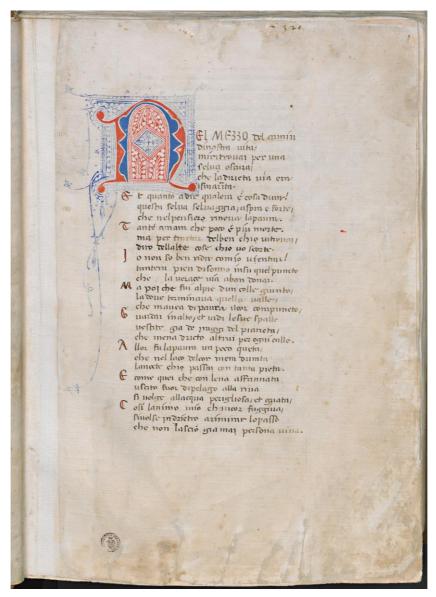
Boccaccio's prestige and authoritativeness generated a substantial number of manuscripts, thereby contributing to consolidating a 'vulgate' as culturally significant as it is unreliable from a strictly textual standpoint. Its inferior lessons even ended up permeating printed tradition, from the Aldine version overseen by Pietro Bembo (Venice, Aldo Manuzio, 1502) to the edition of the *Comedy* by the Accademia della Crusca (Florence, Domenico Manzani, 1595)[58]. Nevertheless, among the numerous manuscripts dating back to the second half of the 14th century (about 200) there are several that, rightly or wrongly, enjoyed special attention and fame in the past, such as the Bartoliniano 50 (at the Biblioteca Arcivescovile e Bartoliniana in Udine, once owned by

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[56] See at least BAGLIO (2013a, 277f.).

[57] See BAGLIO (2013b, 281-83).

[58] On the subject, see the latest study of MECCA (2013b, 9-59).

Michele della Torre, bishop of Adria), ms. Bolognese 589 (now at the Biblioteca Universitaria, donated by Pope Benedict XIV to the University of Bologna), the Conventi Soppressi 204 at the Biblioteca Laurenziana (commissioned by Pietro Gambacorta, Lord of Pisa), the Laurentian Palatino 74 (once owned by the powerful Guinigi family of Lucca), the Vaticano Ottoboniano Lat. 2358 (owned by Pope Benedict XIV), the

Tab. 7. LauSC, f. 1r

Laurentian Plut. 40.7 (with a wealth of illustrations) and the so-called ʻTempiano Maggioreʼ (formerly part of the collection of Marquis Luigi Tempi and at the Biblioteca Laurenziana since 1839 with the shelfmark Tempi 1), in which the text of the *Comedy* is often accompanied by extensive comments and/or marvellous illustrations[59].

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[59] For obvious reasons of space, see at least MALATO – MAZZUCCHI (2011).

The Laurenziano Plut. 26 sin. 1 (*LauSC*; see **Table 7**) is also a very significant representative of the late 14th century Florentine tradition of the *Comedy*. As is well know and widely accepted, responsibility for the graphics of the manuscript was attributed by Fra Tedaldo della Casa (on fol. 201r: see the transcription just ahead) to the Florentine chronicler Filippo Villani (1325-1407/9)[60].

The codex is significant due to the presence of original lessons and valuable contaminations, and it was probably completed in the 1390s, when the University of Florence commissioned Villani to hold a series of Dante readings (1391-1402). Nevertheless, we cannot reject the possibility that the manuscript was completed in 1401, as indicated – probably by Villani himself – at the end of the *Comedy* (external margin of fol. 200v); the year it was copied was later changed to 1343, due to an obvious misunderstanding of the *colophon* by Fra Sebastiano Bucelli, the librarian at the Franciscan convent of Santa Croce[61]. Again with regard to dating, it is important to note that Fra Tedaldo's numerous interventions, easily identifiable also because they were done in pen and red ink (the *explicit* of the cantos, rubrics, running titles, short comments in the margins of cantos II-IX of the *Inferno*, the *colophon* on fol. 201r), must be dated to the last years of his life (around 1410), when Villani had likely already been dead for some time, as can be deduced from the *colophon* of fol. 201r, which reads:

> Questo libro fu scripto per mano di messer
> Phylippo Villani, il quale in Firenze in
> publiche scuole molti anni gloriosa|mente
> con expositione leterali, all[e]gorice,
> anag[og]ice et morali lesse il predetto [*il predetto*, crossed out]
> et sue expositioni a molti sono communicate[62].

The most interesting codicological aspect is the layout of the text on the page, where the frequent presence of large blank spaces between cantos (perhaps left to accommodate extensive introductory rubrics on the subject matter) seems to suggest an incomplete text. The large Laurentian codex (380 mm. high and 270 mm. wide) from the convent of Santa Croce has a full-page layout that generally has 33 lines of writing (11 tercets). Villani used a small, closely spaced and morphologically simplified *littera textualis*

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[60] For a description of the codex, see BERTELLI (2016, 553-55, fig. 59, with former bibliography).

[61] In the *colophon*, it is read: «Completum in festo sancte Anne [26 July] in quo dux Athenarum Gualterius tyrannus civitatis Florentie pulsus est»; followed by indication «1401». Bucelli crossed out the first three numbers of the date and added «343»: «[140]1*343*». On the dating, see also POMARO (2001, 1067).

[62] The ms. also belonged to another copyist, who signs himself at f. 200v: «Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro». On this copyist, see TANTURLI (2008, 75-78).

resembling that of Boccaccio's three autograph manuscripts. Indeed, like the Chigiano L.VI.213 (*Chig*), the Riccardiano 1035 (*Ri*) and the Toledano 104.6 (*To*), the Laurentian Plut. 26 sin. 1 shows an important innovation with respect to the rest of the 14th-century manuscript production of the Poem. This innovation, which can also be found alongside other graphic characteristics in the outline of several manuscripts of the *Comedy* from the end of century, would subsequently be considered one of the distinctive elements of the old-style humanistic codex: the introduction of the tercet initials in the form of epigraphic capitals (e.g. *A, E, M, N* and so on)[63].

3. The 15th century and the first printed editions

The body of 15th-century copies of the *Comedy* is extremely rich (representing about two-thirds of the entire tradition; translated into numbers, the figure is unquestionably over 500 units). Despite this abundant testimony, however, this is certainly the part of the tradition of the Poem that has been explored the least and is not nearly as well known by scholars. It thus represents a very fertile source of information not only to investigate its geographical and social dissemination, but also for the study of the manuscripts, individual copyists and illuminators, and the centres that copied and produced Dante's text[64].

From an exegetic standpoint, it seems that the scholastic production of the *Comedy* continued uninterruptedly in the late 14th and early 15th century. There is no question that, with the new century, strictly exegetic tradition dropped off dramatically, almost as if the 14th-century comments on the Poem were considered sufficient for understanding and explaining Dante's work. In fact, apart from the work of Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle, who wrote his comment in Latin between February 1416 and January 1417 to make Dante's masterpiece accessible to everyone participating in the Council of Constance (and, in any case, he declared himself a disciple of Benvenuto da Imola), the commentary on the *Inferno* by Guiniforte Barzizza, written a few years later (dating to around 1440), and the 1477-78 revision by Martino Paolo Nibia (called Nidobeato) of the commentary by Iacopo della Lana (but also using glosses taken from the comments of Pietro Alighieri and Guido da Pisa), essentially nothing new appeared until Cristoforo Landino's commentary (printed in Florence in 1481 by Niccolò della Magna with

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[63] On this particular type of book, see BERTELLI (2007a).

[64] As already observed by FOLENA (1965-1966, vol. I, 60f.). On the subject, it is always of great use DIONISOTTI (1965, vol. I, 333-78).

engravings after drawings by Sandro Botticelli). In short, unlike what had occurred in the previous century, throughout most of the 1400s the *Comedy* no longer represented a text on which to exercise one's critical abilities, an evident sign of an abrupt divergence – if not a complete break – between the scholastic world and the doctrinal content of Dante's work. Not surprisingly, from the standpoint of the manuscript tradition there is very little testimony of the commentary of Giovanni da Serravalle (handed down to us in five manuscripts, to which we must add four others between those that have been lost and those whose identification is uncertain), but also Barzizza's (likewise handed down to us in five codices, in addition to which there are six others containing only the introductory letter plus one that has been lost). Obviously the case of Landino's commentary is different, as it represents the very successful result of a new season, both philosophical and philological.

Despite this documented divergence between the scholastic and doctrinal realms, however, the *Comedy* was produced in large quantities, following all the graphic and book models that characterized the late Middle Ages. In other words, from a codicological standpoint, between the late 14th century and around the end of the 15th (things would change to some extent with the advent of printing) the manuscript containing the text of the *Comedy* was characterized by a very wide range in terms of quality, product and type. Production probably moved at a very fast pace and in the variety of materials, writing, layout techniques and ornamentation – in short, in what is technically defined as the set of "graphic aspects" and "publishing" choices of the copyist – this testifies to extraordinary and unflagging interest in the work among an extremely varied and heterogeneous readership. In this kind of context, we can thus find products intended for private use, for study purposes, executed personally and generally rather second-rate and sometimes even quite modest in quality, as well as *Comedy* that were instead for prestigious patrons, luxurious copies made by professionals[65]. It is above all among the latter that, in the illustrations, we find the development of the "visualization" of the Poem, the representation of its "figurative exegesis"[66].

In this jumble of manuscripts, the book type that explicitly evokes the humanistic conception and model of codex, the so-called "ancient style" *Comedy*, becomes particularly relevant also from a numerical standpoint[67]. One of the studies I conducted several years ago led to the identification of no less than 86 copies characterized

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[65] On this aspect, see PETRUCCI (1988, 1229); and MIGLIO (2001, Vol. I, 295-323).

[66] See at least BATTAGLIA RICCI (2001, vol. I, 601-39); MIGLIO (2003, 377-401).
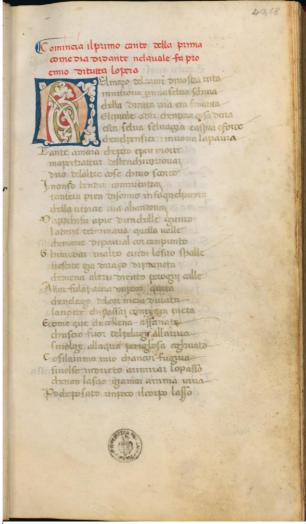
[67] See BERTELLI (2007a).

essentially by two elements: writing and decoration. In fact, the most immediate and striking codicological aspect that differentiates and distinguishes this book type from other models has to do with graphics. Two types of writing were adopted by copyists in the 15th century to create a humanist manuscript: *littera antiqua* (humanistic minuscule or humanistic round-hand; the terms are equivalent) and humanistic cursive[68]. As far as decoration is concerned, the humanistic book is generally associated with the presence of illustrative apparatuses using the technique referred to as white vine-stem decorations. This decorative work was executed with a brush, with the continuous and sometimes complex interweaving of white vines ending with floral motifs; they are arranged – sometimes on one or more ornamental friezes – to frame or surround an initial letter of a work or its internal division. This letter is always in the form of an epigraphic capital and can vary in size depending on the importance of the textual or individual section. Consequently, it can be large, medium or small, depending on whether it introduces or complements a text section considered especially significant. It is not uncommon to find the most important initials with busts of authors, thus forming a link with the white vine-stem decorations in the ornamental friezes along the margins. In deluxe manuscripts, this type of decoration can also be accompanied by medallions containing the title of the work or the patron's name, aristocratic coats of arms and, more rarely, series of illuminations illustrating the subject.

The Laurentian Plutei 40.18 (**Table 8**), 40.19 and 40.28 are particularly interesting because of their dating (late 14th/early 15th century) and they are paralleled by ms. Italiano e.6 at the Bodleian Library in Oxford based on compelling codicological and palaeographic affinities[69]. From a general standpoint, these codices share a number of characteristics. In terms of content, they contain only the text of the *Comedy* (with the exception of Plut. 40.19, which alongside the Poem includes the 'Ottimo commento', missing the headpiece of the first part of the preface and with della Lana's interpolations), which in the Oxford and Plut. 40.18 manuscripts is accompanied by short rubrics in Latin (1-2 lines of writing). In Plut. 40.28 the rubrics are in the vernacular and are rather long (3-7 lines of writing), while they are not present in Plut. 40.19. With regard to material, they are parchment codices that are quite large (averaging around 200 folios), organized in quinternions in a medium format (Plut. 40.28) or medium-small format (Italiano e.6 and Plut. 40.18; obviously Plut. 40.19 is more substantial, as it

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[68] On this subject, see MORISON (1944, 13); PETRUCCI (1969, 295-313); CASAMASSIMA (1974, IX-XXXIII); DE LA MARE (1977, 91).

[69] For a description of the manuscripts, see RODDEWIG (1984, 49 n. 110, 49 n. 111, 53 n. 120 and 225 n. 528); for the Oxoniense ms., see also BERTELLI (2007a, 264 n. 86, fig. 89) and ZAMPONI (2009, 302f. n. 95 and fig.).

includes the commentary), with a full-page layout of a rather modest number of *terze rime* (ten for Plut. 40.18, and twelve for Italiano e.6 and Plut. 40.28; they vary according to the length of the comment in Plut. 40.19). The Oxford codex and Plut. 40.28 are written in simplified *littera textualis* by a single copyist, Plut. 40.19 is in an ancient-style bastard script, and Plut. 40.18 uses both types. Lastly, Italiano e.6 was decorated in a very simple style, presenting rubricated initials alternating red and blue, with greater emphasis in Plutei 40.18 and 40.19, and in Plut. 40.28. In fact, Plut. 40.19 (like the other two Laurentian manuscripts) is noteworthy for the presence of three large initials for the
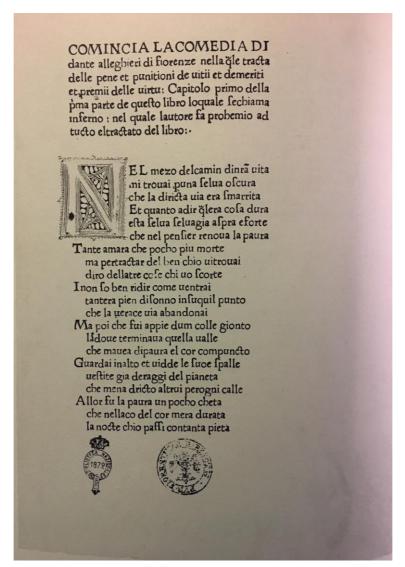

Tab. 8. Firenze, BML, Plut. 40.18, f. 1r

cantiche (on fols. 1r, 58r and 114v), a type that did not become widespread until the early 15th century: namely, a square form with the initial in gold and white vine-stem decorations against a polychrome ground[70]. These characteristics seem to have led to a new book type differing from those encountered so far[71].

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[70] On this particular decoration typologies, see at least DE LA MARE (1977, 98-108).

[71] On this subject, see DEROLEZ (1984).

In fact, the 14th-century *Comedy* is generally presented in the form of a medium-large manuscript laid out in two columns, and the number of pages rarely exceeds 100. Therefore, we can probably surmise that towards the end of the 14th century there was a decisive change in the techniques used to produce the manuscript book with Dante's work. This change first of all involved a smaller format, shifting from medium-large to medium and medium-small sizes, but it also involved the *mise en page*, which changed substantially, as in the 15th century (in the wake of Boccaccio's model) the general

Tab. 9. Firenze, BNC, Banco Rari 98, f. 2r

preference for two columns changed to a single column in the middle of the page, making the manuscripts significantly longer, around 200 folios.

The tradition of the *Comedy* in the second half of the 15th century, already quite sweeping and diverse, was further enriched following the invention of printing[72]. Although they are of little value from a textual standpoint and were generally based on

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[72] See MECCA (2013b, 33-77); and COGLIEVINA (2001, vol. I, 325-70).

randomly chosen manuscripts, the first printed editions of the *Comedy* are nevertheless significant for the history of the success of Dante's *Comedy*. As we know, the first edition (*editio princeps*) was printed in the town of Foligno, near Perugia, in 1472 ("nel quarto mese a dì cinque et sei", meaning 11 April), by Johann Numeister of Mainz (*IGI* nr. 352; see **Table 9**)[73], as we can read in the *colophon*:

> Nel mille quatro cento septe et due
> nel quarto mese adì cinque et sei
> questa opera gentile impressa fue.
> Io maestro Iohanni Numeister opera dei
> alla decta impressione et meco fue
> El fulginato Evangelista mei.

In the above-mentioned *colophon*, two of the three leading figures involved in the Foligno edition are specifically mentioned: the first is the "maestro Iohanni Numeister", while the second is listed in the last verso of the two tercets, "El filginato Evangelista mei".

The German Johann Numeister, trained in Mainz, perhaps at the famous workshop of Gutemberg (the inventor of movable type, which he used to print the famous 'Forty-two-line Bible' in Mainz between 1453 and 1455), was a printer of great artistic and technical qualities. He executed outstanding editions of liturgical books in particular, such as the illustrated edition of the *Meditationes* by the Spanish bishop Juan de Torquemada dated 1479 (printed in Mainz, where Johann had evidently returned) and re-proposed in 1481 in the French city of Albi, near Toulouse, where he had subsequently moved. There was also the so-called *Missale d'Uzès* (printed together with his compatriot Michael Topie) in 1495 in Lyon, where he had already printed numerous other works such as the *Breviarium Viennense* (bearing the date of 24 January 1489), commissioned by Angelo Cato of Benevento, archbishop of Vienne, and a *Psalterium cum hymnis* (15 February 1489). Also interesting – and not only because of ties with the Foligno *editio princeps* of the *Comedy* – are *De bello Italico adversus Gothos* by Leonardo Bruni (published in 1470, *IGI* nr. 2188), a work that was extraordinarily popular in the 15th century, and Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares* (*IGI* nr. 2810), which is undated but that we can confidently assert was published the following year (1471). Numeister died in Lyon around 1522.

In the *colophon* of the *Comedy* we can also read the name and homeland of the German master's companion in printing the "opera gentile": the "fulginato Evangelista",

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[73] See CASAMASSIMA (1972). The repertory IGI corresponds to *Indice generale degli incunaboli delle biblioteche d'Italia*, Roma, Ist. Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1943-1981, 6 voll.

Evangelista Angelini, a native of Trevi who moved to Foligno before 1470. He played a key role in the Foligno edition and, in fact, was its true mastermind: he can be credited with the linguistic patina of the *editio princeps*, which shows a colourful southern Umbrian air that cannot be traced to the 'exemplar' used at the printing works (the Lolliniano 35 from the Biblioteca del Seminario in Belluno, which has the same anomalies, lacunae and lapses of the pen present in the Foligno edition)[74] but, rather, to the typographer, who acted like a scribe regarding graphic-phonetic interventions on the text. The third (undeclared) key figure in the 1472 edition of the *Comedy* was Emiliano degli Orfini, Numeister's partner, and an engraver, medallist and minter from Foligno (d. after 1492). Working with the proto-typographer from Mainz, at his house in Foligno where he had set up a printer shop, Orfini printed both *De bello Italico adverus Gothos* (of 1470, mentioned above, in which the *colophon* reads: "Hunc libellum Emilianus de Orfinis Fulginas | & Iohannes Numeister theutunicus: eiusque sotii | feliciter impresserunt Fulginei in domo eiusdem | Emiliani anno domini Millesimoquadringente|simoseptuagesimo feliciter»), and the *editio princeps* of the Poem, for which he probably designed and engraved its magnificent humanist characters.

The Mantua edition (Georg and Paul of Butzbach, *IGI* nr. 353) and the Venice edition (Federico de' Conti, 18 July 1472, *IGI* nr. 354) appeared the same year, but they are decidedly less interesting if we consider the design of the types and the architecture of the page. Two Neapolitan editions were modelled after several copies of the Foligno edition: one dated 12 April 1477 (Mattia di Olomouc the Moravian, *IGI* nr. 355) and one from 1478-79 (Francesco del Tuppo, *IGI* nr. 356).

Among the oldest incunabula (a term that literally means 'books in the cradle'), we can also cite the Vatican edition of 1477 (Vindelino da Spira, *IGI* nr. 358), the Milanese one of 1477-78 (Ludovico and Alberto Piemontesi), also known as the 'Nidobeatina' as it was curated by Nidobeato of Novara, who – as already noted – added his revision of Jacopo della Lana's commentary (*IGI* nr. 359), and above all the Florentine edition dated 30 August 1481 (Nicolò di Lorenzo della Magna), a magnificent and very successful folio exemplar of the *Comedy*, with a commentary by Cristoforo Landino and engravings by Baccio Bandini after drawings attributed to Sandro Botticelli (*IGI* nr. 360)[75].

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[74] See CASAMASSIMA (1972, 61-83).

[75] On which, Dionisotti said: «la prima edizione a stampa della *Commedia* [...] fu tale che d'un colpo solo annullò quanto altrove editori e stampatori avevano fatto per illustrare l'opera di Dante» (DIONISOTTI 1965, 372).

The edition of the *Comedy* printed in Venice by Aldo Manuzio in 1502 and curated by the humanist cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) is particularly noteworthy, due not only to the prominence and importance of the curator and printer, but also the profound influence it would have on all the other 16th-century publications of the Poem. As we know, the manuscript followed for the Aldine edition of 1502 was Vatican Latin 3199 (*Vat*), the exemplar Boccaccio gave Petrarch between the summer of 1351 and May 1353, and later owned by Bernardo Bembo (Pietro's father and a senator of the Venetian Republic). However, the printer's exemplar was not the actual *Vat*, but a copy written by Bembo, namely, the one now referred to as Vatican Latin 3197, "in which the usual conjectural interventions on the text went hand in hand with systematic work to standardize spelling and prosody"[76].

The Aldine edition of the *Comedy* was an extraordinary operation not only from a philological standpoint, but due also to the great innovation of the formal choices made by the duo of Bembo-Manuzio. This is evident from the use of a special and unique title (it was not repeated in the later printed tradition), namely, *Le terze rime di Dante*, explicitly evoking the metre of the Poem, with the subtitle *Lo 'nferno e il Purgatorio e 'l Paradiso di Dante Alighieri* (on the *verso* of the title page), as well as the format, a small octavo, much smaller than the large and majestic folio volumes. It includes 244 folios that are unnumbered and have no catchwords, thus forming a practical, easy-to-handle book – we would call it 'portable' today – printed using a brand-new typeface, the cursive. The 1502 Aldine edition was reprinted in 1515 ("nelle case d'Aldo e d'Andrea di Asola suo suocero, nell'anno 1515 del mese di agosto"), with the title *Dante col sito, et forma dell'Inferno tratta dalla istessa descrittione del Poeta*.

As noted at the beginning of this essay, it was on an exemplar of this 1515 Aldine edition that in 1548 the Florentine Luca Martini annotated the variants of an extremely old codex of the *Comedy*, written by the parish priest Forese Donati between October 1330 and January 1331. That copy has been lost, but its vestiges have survived in the margins of this valuable manuscript, now at the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan (*Mart*).

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[76] See CIOCIOLA (2001, 184).

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