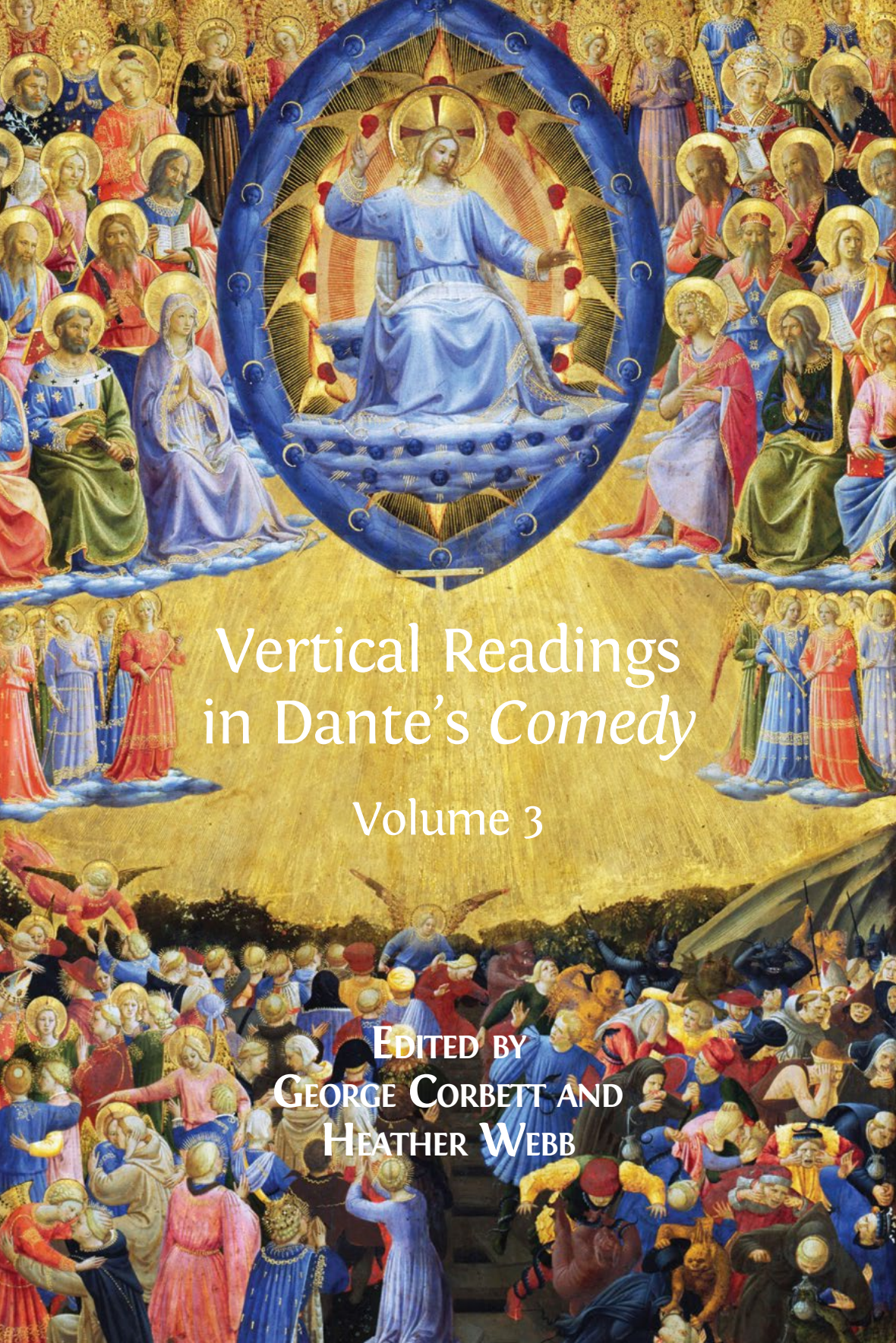

Vertical Readings in Dante's *Comedy*

Volume 3

Edited by
George Corbett and
Heather Webb

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Contents

28. Cosmographic Cartography of the 'Perfect' Twenty-Eights

Theodore J. Cachey Jr.

Besides its intrinsic interest for the interpretation of the poem, the Cambridge vertical readings project raises many intriguing, and indeed, fundamental methodological questions. This chapter takes as its point of departure one of these: the numerological system that evidently informed the design of the poem. It is likely, in fact, that when many readers of the poem first heard of the vertical readings project their minds went directly to perhaps the most widely recognized and commented upon case of Dante's clearly aligning a set of three cantos distributed across three canticles in the same position along the poem's vertical axis according to a thematic criterion: the Sixes. But how many readers would think of relating this structural feature to the fact that the number six is the first perfect number?

Simply put, perfect numbers are those numbers that equal the sum of their divisors. The first number to fulfil this condition is 6, which can be divided by 1, by 2, and by 3, with the sum of these divisors adding up to 6; and the second perfect number is 28, with the divisors 1, 2, 4, 7, and 14, which add up to 28. Perfect numbers are extremely rare. Arithmetic, as taught during the medieval period in the tradition of Boethius, was acquainted with only four perfect numbers: 6, 28, 496, and 8128.

In an important paper on perfect numbers, medieval number theory and their relation to biblical exegesis and medieval compositional practices, Otfried Lieberknecht discussed the practical application of the arithmetic of perfect numbers by medieval exegetes of the Bible, who applied it to

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more or less every biblical occurrence of the number six and twenty-eight, and in particular to the six days of the creation, including Augustine in his biblical commentaries.[1] Lieberknecht offered in his paper a largely persuasive interpretation of *Inferno* xxviii in which he argued that the canto is structured in its parts and as a whole according to the concept of the *numerus perfectus*. Lieberknecht did not concern himself with the cartographic dimensions of *Inferno* xxviii that will be the focal point of this essay. Indeed, I do not think that before the vertical readings project it would have occurred to anyone to argue as I would like to do here, that the *numerus perfectus* informed the macro structure of the three canticles, according to a design in which the Sixes and the Twenty-Eights played a key structural role.

For beyond the political thematic that the Sixes share and that has been the focus of critical commentary, their vertical disposition within the poem's macrostructure appears to be informed by an overlooked and understudied geospatial criterion. That is to say, the political theme is parsed according to spatial parameters: those associated with the city of Florence in *Inferno* vi, the Italian peninsula in *Purgatorio* vi, and the inhabited world or *oikumene* in *Paradiso* vi. Just as the 'perfect' Sixes parse the body politic according to a geographical criterion that progressively maps the distribution of the human community in space, Dante offers us in the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights a mapping programme that establishes the cosmological setting of each of the three canticles and, cumulatively, of the entire poem in a progression that goes from a *mappamundi* of the inhabited world in *Inferno* xxviii to a *descriptio orbis* encompassing the entire terrestrial sphere in *Purgatorio* xxviii (including the discovery or 'invention' of the Earthly Paradise), to the contemplation of the divine plan of the entire cosmos in *Paradiso* xxviii. Moreover, beyond number theory there are fundamentally metaphysical motivations that inspire the mapping programme of the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights that go to the very heart of the poetics of the cosmographical poem and its truth claim. These will be the subject of some reflections in the last part of this *lectura*.

But first, the methodological digression on numerology needs to be developed a bit further, for there is some evidence to suggest that perhaps

1 Otfried Lieberknecht, *Dante's Historical Arithmetics: The Numbers Six and Twenty-eight as 'numeri perfecti secundum partium aggregationem' in Inferno XXVIII*, paper given at the 32nd International Congress on Medieval Studies, 8–11 May 1997, Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo), during the session n. 322 (Problems in Dante's *Inferno*, dir. Christopher Kleinhenz, sponsored by the Dante Society of America), http://www.lieberknecht.de/~diss/papers/p_np_txt.htm

the Fourteens might also play a role in a numerological macro structure, held together as it were, by a cosmological and geographical thematic. In fact, Virgil's account in *Inferno* xiv of the river system of Hell and its sources in the tears of the giant or 'veglio' of Crete is vital for an understanding of the geospatial parameters of the first two canticles. As we will learn in *Purgatorio* xxviii, the river Lethe at the summit of Mount Purgatory, which washes away the memories of the sins of the repentant at the end of their penitential journeys, is continuous with the river system of Hell (*Inf.*, xiv. 136–38). We will see in more detail below how the Lethe connects with the Earthly Paradise in a global system that converges at the earth's center at the bottom of the universe. Moreover, the connection between *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xxviii is an important one for the overall mapping programme of the poem for the way that it situates the island of Crete at the center of the *oikumene*, in opposition to the island of Purgatory, as part of a global triangle of juxtapositioning that involves as its third element Jerusalem at the antipodes from the Mountain of Purgatory.[2]

A linkage between *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xiv, on the other hand, is not hard to discern. The latter is dedicated to a cartographically inflected review of the degraded ethical state of the central regions of the Italian peninsula that were crucial to the poet's biographical experience, the first part of which, dedicated to Tuscany, is focused by a description of the Arno river and its course. *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xiv ostentatiously share a riverine thematic. Dante alludes very clearly to the river system of Hell in the account of the downward course of the Arno River and the inhabitants along its banks, whose moral and ethical qualities go from bad to worse in a way that parallels the further down is worse character of the river system of Hell that descends from Acheron to Styx, to Phlegeton, to Cocytus.[3] In her vertical reading of the Fourteens, Catherine Keen noted this connection between *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xiv, but was stymied as to any further parallels linking these cantos to *Paradiso* xiv.[4] Given the connections between *Inferno* xiv and *Purgatorio* xxviii, one might wonder

2 These observations are informed by Ambrogio Camozzi, 'Il veglio di Creta alla luce di Matelda — Una lettura comparativa di *Inferno* XIV e *Purgatorio* XXVIII', *The Italianist* 29.1 (2009), 3–49.

3 Regarding *Purgatorio* xiv see Catherine M. Keen's insightful '"A Local Habitation and a Name": Origins and Identity in *Purgatorio* XIV', *L'Alighieri* 49 (gennaio-giugno 2017), 69–90.

4 Catherine M. Keen, 'The Patterning of History: Poetry, Politics and Adamic Renewal', in *Vertical Readings in Dante's 'Comedy': Volume 2*, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), pp. 55–76, http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0100.04

whether considering the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights as a set in relation to the Fourteens might enable us to make some further connections. The linkages between the Fourteens of the first two canticles and *Purgatorio* xxviii are indeed intriguing, and I will return to the question of whether there might be further structural resonances to uncover between the Fourteens and the Twenty-Eights below.

A Cartographic Reading of *Inferno* xxviii

In what sense is our reading cartographic? The mapping impulse in Dante corresponded and was in response to the transition from medieval place to early modern space that was occurring during the time that Dante was writing.[5] The cartographic manifestation of this transition (for which the shipwrecked voyage of Ulysses, foreshadowing the discovery of the New World, is perhaps the best-known expression in Dante's oeuvre) was the emergence of the empirically based nautical charts of the Mediterranean basin, as exemplified by the Carta Pisana, the earliest of this type of map to survive, and by the Dulcert chart dated 1339 (see Figs. 1 and 2). These nautical charts or portolans came alongside medieval *mappaemundi*, ranging from the canonical Hereford map to a less well-known eighth century map in the Vatican Library, which features Dante's Crete-centered *oikumene* (see Figs. 3 and 4). The empirical charts were eventually to overtake the *mappaemundi* and render them obsolete.[6]

5 Pierre Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 139–268; Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 103–15; Alexander Murray, 'Purgatory and the Spatial Imagination', in *Dante and the Church: Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. by Paolo Acquaviva and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 61–92; Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., 'Cosmology, Geography and Cartography', in *Dante in Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 221–40; *idem*, 'Cartographic Dante: A Note on Dante and the Greek Mediterranean', in *Dante and the Greeks*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2014), pp. 197–226.

6 For the tradition of medieval *mappaemundi*, see the studies of Evelyn Edson, including *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, with E. Savage-Smith (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004); *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed their World* (London: British Library, 1999); and *The World Map, 1300–1492: The Persistence of Tradition and Transformation* (Baltimore, MD and Santa Fe, NM: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); for the portolan chart, see Tony Campbell, 'Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500', in *The History of Cartography, Volume one, Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. by J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 371–463.

Fig. 1 *Carta Pisana*, late 13th century, © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. Ge. B. 1118, all rights reserved.

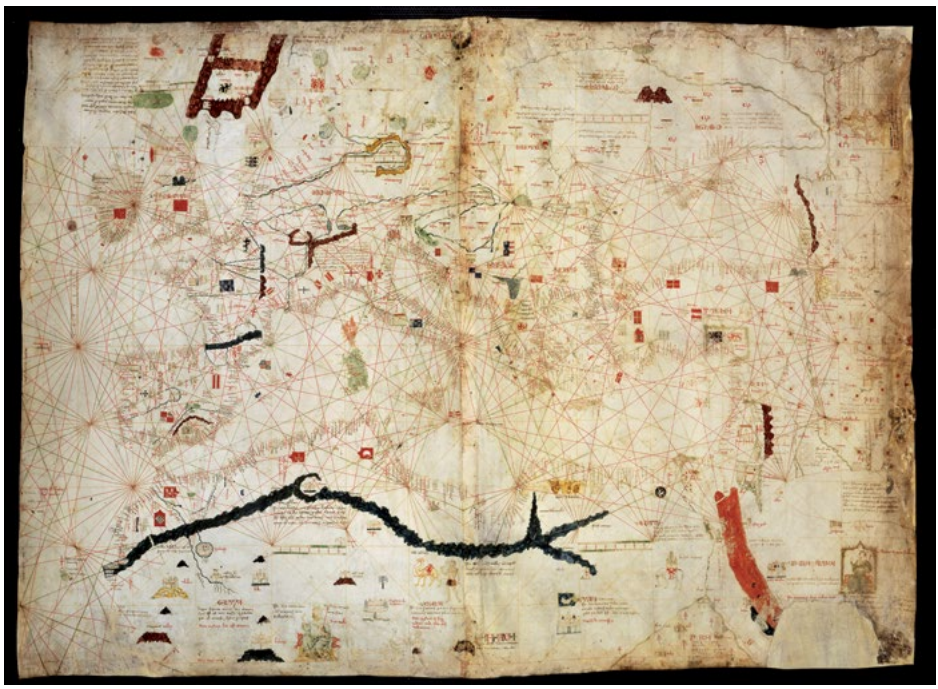

Fig. 2 Angelino Dulcert, *Carta nautica*, 1339, © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. Ge. B 696, all rights reserved.

Fig. 3 *Hereford Mappamundi*, *ca.*1300, © The Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral and the Hereford Mappamundi Trust, all rights reserved.

Fig. 4 *Mappamundi*, 8th century. This *mappamundi* represents a Crete-centered *oikumene*. © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6018 ff. 63v-64r., all rights reserved.

Dante is highly sensitive to these developments in the history of cartography. He is aware of the principal genres of cartographic representation and utilizes them in a metaliterary, or rather, a meta-cartographic manner during the course of the poem.[7] In the same way that Dante absorbs, synthesizes, and transcends his literary sources he transforms prior and contemporary traditions of mapping. Dante was especially attuned to the epistemological and representational issues raised by mapping, no less than he was to those raised by writing, especially as regards the relationship between literary representation and truth. The mapping programme of the poem ultimately serves Dante as a means of reinforcing both the truth claim, made most explicitly in *Inferno* xvi, and the metaphysical foundations of the poem.

7 See Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., 'Title, Genre, and Metaliterary Aspects of Dante's *Commedia*', in *Cambridge Companion to the Divine Comedy*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Simon Gilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

In the *Inferno* Dante utilizes three principal cartographic genres characteristic of his age, including the medieval *mappaemundi* or T-O maps, the nautical or portolan chart, and the regional or chorographic map of a territory. Very few regional maps of any territory survive from the age of Dante other than maps of the Holy Land, and only a couple of regional maps of Italy survive, from just after Dante.[8] The poet's detailed mappings of Italy throughout the three canticles are among his most innovative contributions to cartographic writing. Indeed, arguably the most detailed and compelling cartographic representation of the peninsula to survive from Dante's time is found in the *Commedia* itself. The strikingly modern cartographic mode of conceiving of Italy as a unity of language and culture was of course foreshadowed in Dante's linguistic treatise, the *De vulgari eloquentia*, whose birds-eye territorialization of the peninsula represented in its own right an important chapter in the history of cartography.[9]

Inferno xxviii is the culmination of the mapping programme of the first canticle and it establishes the premises for a cartographic programme that plays out in the rest of the poem along the axis of the Twenty-Eights. The canto presents a kind of analogy to the most advanced cartographic practices of the time, as exemplified by the Vatican map by Pietro Vesconte (*ca*.1320; see Fig. 5), the most sophisticated cartographer of the period, which brings together the nautical map and the *mappamundi*. In fact, in *Inferno* xxviii Dante fashions a kind of palimpsest of cartographic genres. The canto represents the culmination of the cartographic programme of the first canticle together with other culminating or cumulative aspects of that canto which have been noted before. These range from the emphasis on the rhetorical figure of *accumulatio*[10] to the synthetic articulation of the principle of the *contrapasso* which had guided the system of justice and representation of the entire canticle. The explicit definition of *contrapasso* is given by the sower of discord Bertran de Born who can be said to 'reap what he sows', in an episode which also includes an emphatic assertion by the poet that he is telling the truth. Dante's claim that he is telling the truth, as we will see, is an important sub-theme of the perfect Twenty-Eights.

8 See Michelina Di Cesare, 'Il sapere geografico di Boccaccio tra tradizione e innovazione: *l'imago mundi* di Paolino Veneto e Pietro Vesconte', in *Boccaccio geografo, Un viaggio nel Mediterraneo tra le città, I giardini e… il 'mondo' di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Roberta Morosini and Andrea Cantile (Florence: Maura Paglia Editore, 2010), pp. 67–88.

9 See Franco Farinelli, 'L'immagine dell'Italia', in *Geografia politica delle regioni italiane*, ed. by Pasquale Coppola (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 33–59.

10 See Edoardo Sanguineti, *Interpretazione di Malebolge* (Florence: Olschki, 1961), pp. 284–85; and Pietro G. Beltrami, 'Metrica e sintassi nel canto XXVIII dell'*Inferno*', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 162 (1985), 1–26.

Fig. 5 Pietro Vesconte, *Mappamundi*, *ca.*1320, © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal.lat.1362A_0008_fa_0001v-2r, all rights reserved.

The hypothetical simile that opens *Inferno* xxviii (ll. 7–21) describing the 'fortunata terra / di Puglia' [Apulia, land laid low by war] (ll. 8–9), which is a synecdoche for the whole south of Italy, completes within the realm of the *Malebolge* of fraud a cartographical outline of the Italian peninsula that the poet had drawn in a series of geographical similes that started in the circle of violence (*Inf*., ix. 112–16; *Inf*., xii. 4–10; *Inf*., xvi. 91–105). The Mediterranean basin of the nautical or portolan charts is synthetically captured by the tercet:

> Tra l'isola di Cipri e di Maiolica
> non vide mai sì gran fallo Nettuno,
> non da pirate, non da gente argolica. (*Inf*., xxviii. 82–84)
>
> [Between the islands of Cyprus and Majorca Neptune never witnessed so terrible a crime, whether one committed by pirates or by Greeks.]

Dante not only recapitulates the previously outlined cartographic parameters of Italy in the canto, but by means of this synecdoche reiterates the eastern and western ends of the Greek Mediterranean that had been traversed in earlier cantos of the eighth circle, by the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts in the eastern Mediterranean (*Inferno* xviii) and by Ulysses's voyage in the farthest west (*Inferno* xxvi). At the same time, however, through the reference, in the same tercet, to Neptune who never witnessed such a crime, the poet establishes a link forward to the farthest limits of the poem and the vision of God at the end of *Paradiso*, so that Dante can be seen to utilize the parameters of the Greek Mediterranean to chart the journey of the poem itself:

> Un punto solo m'è maggior letargo
> che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa
> che fé Nettuno ammirar l'ombra d'Argo (*Par*., xxxiii. 94–96)
>
> [My memory of that moment is more lost than five and twenty centuries make dim that enterprise when, in wonder, Neptune at the Argo's shadow stared.]

But finally, the *contrapasso* of the sowers of discord can itself be seen to figure an inverted *mappamundi* of the T-O type like the twelfth-century

mappa orbis terrae that illustrates Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* or Goro Dati's *Mappamundi* at the Laurenziana Library in Florence (*Inf*., xxviii. 22–33 and 118–23; see Figs. 6 and 7). Within the circular 'dolente strada' or pathway of the sinners at either end of the canto's series of sinners, the vertical cut on the bodies of Mohammed, 'rotto dal mento infin dove si trulla' [cleft from the chin right down to where men fart] (l. 24) and Ali, 'fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto' [his face split open from his chin to forelock] (l. 33), intersects with the horizontal separation of Bertran de Born's' head from his body, 'par ch'io 'l veggia, / un busto sanza capo andar' [I truly saw, and seem to see it still, a headless body make its way] (ll. 118–19), according to an iconographic programme no doubt inspired by a sub genre of *mappamundi* representing the body of Christ projected upon or embracing the *oikumene* (see Figs. 8 and 9). Beyond *Inferno* xxviii a connection can be drawn between the inverted T-O map figured there and the celestial Greek Cross upon which Christ flashes in the Heaven of Mars in *Paradiso* xiv, perhaps inspired by the Cross that Dante would have seen in St Apollinare in Classe (see Figs. 6 and 10).

Fig. 6 *Mappa orbis terrae* (T-O), illustration of a copy from the twelfth-century manuscript of the *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville, © British Library Board, Royal 12 F. IV, f.135v, all rights reserved.

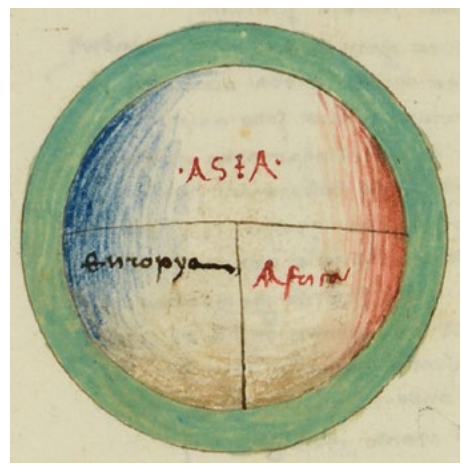

Fig. 7 Goro Dati, *T-O mappamundi*, fifteenth century, Firenze, © Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Conv.Soppr.109 c.65v, detail, all rights reserved.

Fig. 8 *Ebsdorf mappamundi*, 1235–1239. The map was destroyed during the Second World War. © Kloster Ebstorf, all rights reserved.

Fig. 9 *Mappamundi*, *English Psalter*, © British Library Board, Add. MS 28681, f.9r, all rights reserved.

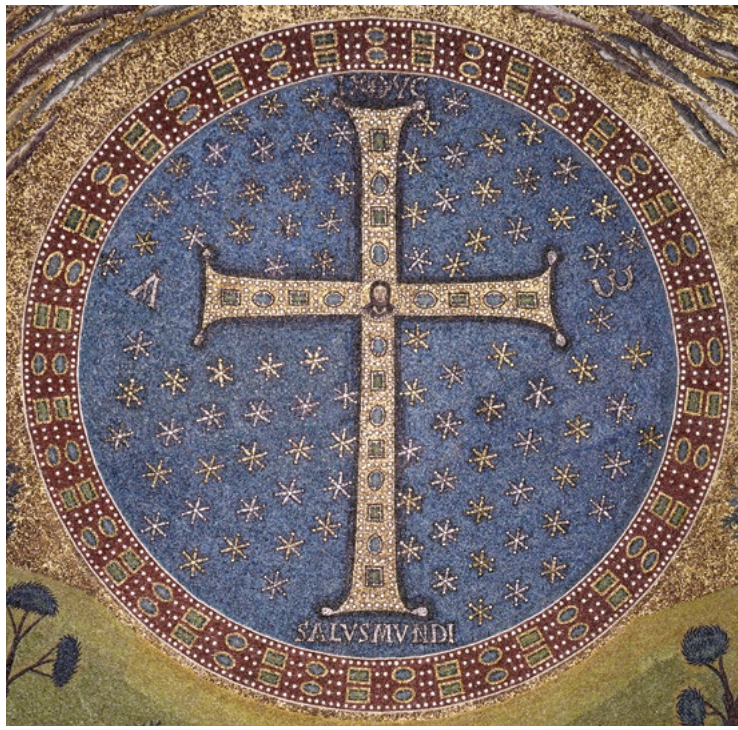

Fig. 10 *Apse mosaic cross*, Ravenna, 6th century, Church of St Apollinare in Classe, © Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, The Regional Museum Complex of Emilia Romagna, all rights reserved.

Come distinta da minori e maggi
lumi biancheggia tra ' poli del mondo
Galassia sì, che fa dubbiar ben saggi;
sì costellati facean nel profondo
Marte quei raggi il venerabil segno
che fan giunture di quadranti in tondo.
Qui vince la memoria mia lo 'ngegno;
ché quella croce lampeggiava Cristo,
sì ch'io non so trovare essempro degno;
ma chi prende sua croce e segue Cristo,
ancor mi scuserà di quel ch'io lasso,
vedendo in quell' albor balenar Cristo. (*Par*., xiv. 97–108)

[As the Milky Way, arrayed with greater and lesser lights, glows white between the universal poles, making even sages wonder how and why, these rays, thus constellated, made, deep within Mars, the venerable sign that the crossing of its quadrants fixes in a circle. Here my memory

> outstrips my skill, for that cross so flamed forth Christ that I can find no fit comparison. But he who takes his cross and follows Christ shall yet forgive me what I leave untold, for shining in that dawn I did see Christ.]

The parodic T-O map, figured by the *contrapasso* inflicted on the bodies of the sowers of discord, Mohammed and Ali and Bertran de Born, is juxtaposed with the Greek Cross of Christ formed by the souls of the martial heroes of the faith celebrated in the Heaven of Mars. This comparison could not be more pointed. It also represents an illustration of the way that the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights reverberate and ramify among the Fourteens, producing a broader system of resonances.

Inventing the Map of Purgatory in *Purgatorio* xxviii

While Dante brings together all the threads of contemporary cartographic representation in his dystopic picture of the inhabited world in *Inferno* xxviii, he goes off the map, so to speak, and sails uncharted waters in *Purgatorio* xxviii. Dante goes beyond his alter ego Ulysses, whose voyage of oceanic discovery beyond the pillars had ended in shipwreck, and beyond the imaginations of the classical poets who 'forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro' [dreamed on Parnassus of perhaps this very place] (*Purg*., xxviii. 141). As Bruno Nardi first illustrated in a famous 1922 essay on 'the myth of Eden',[11] Dante modified, conflated and altered in a highly original manner traditions surrounding the location of the Eden of the church fathers, the scholastics and centuries of medieval cartography in order to arrive at his original 'invention' or 'discovery' (as a kind of Colombus *ante litteram*) of the 'true' location of the Earthly Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory, situated at the antipodes of Jerusalem, thereby placing in geometrical opposition the location of the first man Adam's original sin and the site of Christ's redemptive sacrifice on Golgotha.

The second part of *Purgatorio* xxviii (ll. 85–148) dedicated to Matelda's lesson on the supernatural cosmology of Eden, which foreshadows the cosmological and metaphysical seminars conducted by Beatrice in Paradise, is essential for the cosmographic cartography of the poem, and anticipates the culminating map of the cosmos of *Paradiso* xxviii. *Purgatorio* xxviii is fundamental for the cartography of the poem in both physical

11 Bruno Nardi, 'Intorno al sito del "Purgatorio" e al mito dantesco dell'"Eden"', *Il giornale dantesco* 25 (1922), 289–300.

and metaphysical senses in so far as it maps the physical reality of the cosmos at the same time that, by giving an account of God's providential design, it presages the account of the angelic hierarchy in *Paradiso* xxviii that is ultimately responsible, from a metaphysical perspective, for the implementation of that design.

Purgatorio xxviii, in particular, charts the joining or bond between Heaven and earth, in keeping with the overall theme of the canto that describes an earthly paradise that is both of this world and not of this world. For instance, a direct link is established with 'la prima volta' [the first circling] (l. 104):

> Or perché in circuito tutto quanto
> l'aere si volge con la prima volta,
> se non li è rotto il cerchio d'alcun canto… (*Purg*., xxviii. 103–05)
>
> [Now, since all the air revolves in a circuit with the first circling, unless its revolution is at some point blocked…]

The 'first' or 'primal' revolution ('la prima volta') is that of the *Primum Mobile* or ninth Heaven. The *Primum Mobile* will be the setting for *Paradiso* xxviii, and Dante establishes here a direct topographical link between *Purgatorio* xxviii and *Paradiso* xxviii by virtue of this cosmological joining of the ninth Heaven and the Earthly Paradise. In its diurnal revolution the ninth Heaven sweeps the other spheres or Heavens with it around the earth and at the same time causes the atmosphere to circle the earth with it.

The breeze that caresses the Earthly Paradise is limited, however, to the highest reaches of the mountain. In his commentary to *Purg*., xxviii. 103–04 Charles Singleton noted that:

> [i]n *Meteor.* I, 3, 341[a], Aristotle states that the air flows in a circuit since it is carried along in the total circulation, and Thomas Aquinas [*Exp. Meteor.* I, lect. 5], commenting on Aristotle, had noted: 'Et sic ille aer, qui excedit omnem altitudinem montium, in circuitu fluit; aer autem qui continetur infra montium altitudinem, impeditur ab hoc fluxu ex partibus terrae immobilibus'. ('And accordingly that air, which exceeds the altitude of all the mountains, flows in a circuit; but the air which is contained in the midst of high mountains is impeded in its flow by the immobile parts of the earth'.)[12]

12 Charles Singleton, gloss to *Purg*., xxviii. 103–04, *Dartmouth Dante Project*, https://dante.dartmouth.edu

The precision of the 'scientific' dimensions of Dante's account of the supernatural sources of the breeze and the waters of the Earthly Paradise, reminiscent of Dante's cosmographical treatise, the *Questio de aqua et terra*, are worthy of note. Meteorological details are intermingled, as a kind of terrestrial counterpoint to the overall supernatural nature of Eden, in the account of the breeze and the source of the rivers.[13] These scientific asides serve as an essential support for the truth claim of Dante's account.

Matelda's lecture about the physical and metaphysical properties of the Earthly Paradise and their source, are aimed, moreover (just as Beatrice's discourse will be in the *Paradiso*) at 'unclouding' Dante's mind: 'che puote disnebbiar vostro intelletto' [that may disperse the clouds within your minds] (*Purg*., xxviii. 81), 'e purgherà la nebbia che ti fiede' [and thus disperse the fog assailing you] (*Purg*., xxviii. 90). These passages prepare for the culminating use of this figure in *Paradiso* xxviii that comes at the end of Beatrice's explication of the most difficult problem of Dante's cartographical poetics, as I discuss below:

> Come rimane splendido e sereno
> l'emisperio de l'aere, quando soffia
> Borea da quella guancia ond' è più leno,
> per che si purga e risolve la roffia
> che pria turbava, sì che 'l ciel ne ride
> con le bellezze d'ogne sua paroffia;
> così fec'ïo, poi che mi provide
> la donna mia del suo risponder chiaro,
> e come stella in cielo il ver si vide. (*Par*., xxviii. 79–87)
>
> [As the vault of our air is left serene and shining when Boreas blows from his gentler cheek and the dark refuse of the sky is cleared and purged away so that the Heavens smile as all their quarters fill with loveliness, just so did I feel when my lady bestowed on me her lucid answer, and, like a star in Heaven, the truth shone clear.]

13 Respectively, *Purg*., xxviii. 97–99: 'Perché 'l turbar che sotto da sé fanno / l'essalazion de l'acqua e de la terra, / che quanto posson dietro al calor vanno…' [So that the turbulence below, created by the vapors rising both from land and sea toward the sun's heat as far as they can rise]; and *Purg*., xxviii. 121–23: 'L'acqua che vedi non surge di vena / che ristori vapor che gel converta, / come fiume ch'acquista e perde lena…' [The water you see here does not spring from a vein that is restored by vapor when condensed by cold, like a river that gains and loses flow'].

Purgatorio xxviii also establishes a vital connection with the geography of this world through the hydrological connection that it establishes between the river Lethe and the river system of Hell that traces its origins to the island of Crete as described in *Inferno* xiv. It was there that in response to Dante's query, 'Maestro, ove si trova / Flegetonta e Letè?' [Master, where are Phlegethon and Lethe?] (*Inf.*, xiv. 130–31), Virgil had told Dante that he would eventually encounter Lethe:

> 'Letè vedrai, ma fuor di questa fossa,
> la dove vanno l'anime a lavarsi
> quando la colpa pentuta è rimossa'. (*Inf.*, xiv. 136–38)
>
> [Lethe you shall see: not in this abyss but where the spirits go to cleanse themselves once their repented guilt has been removed.]

When Dante finally arrives in the Earthly Paradise and encounters Lethe, Matelda leaves the pilgrim in no doubt about its source:

> 'esce di fontana salda e certa,
> che tanto dal voler di Dio riprende,
> quant' ella versa da due parti aperta'. (*Purg.*, xxviii. 124–26)
>
> [issues from a sure, unchanging source, which by God's will regains as much as it pours forth to either side.]

Concerning its destination, however, there has been less certainty, although a general consensus has emerged that Lethe, according to Dante's cosmographic cartography, descends to the center of the earth.[14] Thus all of Lucifer's works, even the recollection of sin that survives the penitential ascent, finally flow back to the originator on the icy lake. At the earth's center two streams converge from opposite directions. From Mount Ida on the Mountain of Crete, located in the middle of the inhabited world, descend the tears of the Old Man of Crete. From the Earthly Paradise, situated at the antipodes from Mount Ida, descends the Lethe. The breeze that shakes the trees of the Earthly Paradise, which shower the world with the *virtù* that produces the vegetation of the earth, and the rivers of the Earthly Paradise

14 At least since Daniel J. Donno, 'Moral Hydrography: Dante's Rivers', *Modern Language Notes* 92 (1977), 130–39.

trace their origin to a supernatural source in God's providential design of the universe. Both play vital roles in salvation history, as illustrated by Matelda's cosmological lesson.

The truth claim that Dante makes at the end of the canto for his distinctive and highly original *mappamundi* that locates Eden at the top of Mount Purgatory at the antipodes of Jerusalem is especially worth underscoring. The truth of Dante's poetry of the Earthly Paradise, according to Matelda, surpasses that of the classical poets:

> 'Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro
> l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice,
> forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro.
> Qui fu innocente l'umana radice;
> qui primavera sempre e ogne frutto;
> nettare è questo di che ciascun dice'.
> Io mi rivolsi 'n dietro allora tutto
> a' miei poeti, e vidi che con riso
> udito avëan l'ultimo costrutto (*Purg.*, xxviii. 139–47)

> ['Those who in ancient times called up in verse the age of gold and sang its happy state dreamed on Parnassus of perhaps this very place. Here the root of humankind was innocent, here it is always spring, with every fruit in season. This is the nectar of which the ancients tell'. I turned around then to my poets and saw that they had listened to her final utterance with a smile.]

In recognition of their error the poets smile, just as Gregory the Great smiled when he reached Paradise and realized that he had been mistaken about the order of the celestial hierarchy, according to the account that Dante gives in *Paradiso* xxviii. The true account of the *Commedia* gives the correct order, which corresponds to that of Pseudo-Dionysius:

> E Dïonisio con tanto disio
> a contemplar questi ordini si mise,
> che li nomò e distinse com'io.
> Ma Gregorio da lui poi si divise;
> onde, sì tosto come li occhi aperse
> in questo ciel, di sé medesmo rise.
> E se tanto secreto ver proferse
> mortale in terra, non voglio ch'ammiri:

> ché chi 'l vide qua sù gliel discoperse
> con altro assai del ver di questi giri. (*Par*., xxviii. 130–39)
>
> [Dionysius with such passion set his mind to contemplate these orders that he named them and arranged them as do I. But later Gregory took a different view, so that, opening his eyes here in this Heaven, he saw his errors, laughing at himself. And if a mortal man on earth set forth such hidden truth, you need not wonder: for he who saw it here above revealed it then to him, along with many other truths about these circlings.]

While Dionysius had received his information according to the tradition from St Paul, the poet Dante, like St Paul, gains his knowledge of the celestial order first-hand. It is not by accident that the ends of these two cantos correspond so perfectly. We are supposed to connect them as regards the poem's truth claim. The theme of the smile of recognition at one's error is linked in both cantos to the mapping programme of the 'perfect Twenty-Eights' and to the overarching truth claim that Dante makes for the *Commedia*.[15]

The truth claim made by the poet in connection with the Bertran de Born episode of *Inferno* xxviii (ll. 118–42) had inaugurated this theme along the trajectory of the Twenty-Eights. The culminating canto for this theme, however, along the axis of the Twenty-Eights, is *Paradiso* xxviii, which as Gianfranco Contini observed in his famous *lectura* of that canto, features as its primary structuring verbal motif the word 'vero' and its derivatives.[16] What is the relationship between the truth claim of the poem and the mapping of the *oikumene* in *Inferno* xxviii, of the terrestrial globe in *Purgatorio* xxviii, and of the cosmos in *Paradiso* xxviii? Or to put it another way, as stated at the outset: why cartography? We will return to this in the conclusion.

15 See Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., 'Una nota sugli angeli e l'Empireo', *Italianistica. Rivista di letteratura italiana*. 44.2 (2015), 149–60. For Gregory's smile, see Vittorio Montemaggi, 'Dante and Gregory the Great', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), I, pp. 209–62.

16 Gianfranco Contini, 'Un esempio di poesia dantesca (Il canto XXVIII del '*Paradiso*')', in *idem*, *Un'idea di Dante* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), pp. 191–213: '[…] la parola che qui Dante insegue e ripete, il *vero*, è talmente palese da sottostare alla più vivida illuminazione anzi dell'intenzionalità' (p. 192).

Mapping the Cosmos in *Paradiso* xxviii

Paradiso xxviii, 'in which the pilgrim will come to understand the nature and origin of space', represents, in fact, the crowning achievement of the poem's cosmological mapping.[17] Simply put, Dante completes here the cosmographic cartographical programme of the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights by offering the reader a map of the cosmos from the perspective of the ninth Heaven at the top of the created world. The poet, in fact, conducts himself like a mapmaker in the canto by first setting down the figure or model of the cosmos in *Paradiso* xxviii. 13–45. In Beatrice's commentary in the next section, in lines 46–87, the poet provides essential information concerning the projection and scale of the map. On the one hand, Beatrice translates the latitudes and longitudes, so to speak, of the cosmos in terms of their spatial representation in the model, while on the other she provides the ratio or proportion of distances on the map to the corresponding distances 'in reality'. Finally, Beatrice provides the map's legend, the key to understanding the symbols used on any map, by identifying the nine orders of the angels in lines 97–139.

Dante's map of the cosmos as presented in the figure of nine concentric rings circling around a point of light in verses 13–45 is a special kind of map:

> E com' io mi rivolsi e furon tocchi
> li miei da ciò che pare in quel volume,
> quandunque nel suo giro ben s'adocchi,
> un punto vidi che raggiava lume
> acuto sì, che 'l viso ch'elli affoca
> chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume;
> e quale stella par quinci più poca,
> parrebbe luna, locata con esso
> come stella con stella si collòca.
> Forse cotanto quanto pare appresso
> alo cigner la luce che 'l dipigne
> quando 'l vapor che 'l porta più è spesso,

17 See Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 140. See also for this canto, Alison Cornish, 'The Sufficient Example: *Paradiso* 28', in her *Reading Dante's Stars* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 108–18.

distante intorno al punto un cerchio
d'igne si girava sì ratto, ch'avria vinto
quel moto che più tosto il mondo cigne;
e questo era d'un altro circumcinto,
e quel dal terzo, e 'l terzo poi dal quarto,
dal quinto il quarto, e poi dal sesto il quinto.
Sopra seguiva il settimo sì sparto
già di larghezza, che 'l messo di Iuno
intero a contenerlo sarebbe arto.
Così l'ottavo e 'l nono; e chiascheduno
più tardo si movea, secondo ch'era
in numero distante più da l'uno;
e quello avea la fiamma più sincera
cui men distava la favilla pura,
credo, però che più di lei s'invera.
La donna mia, che mi vedëa in cura
forte sospeso, disse: 'Da quel punto
depende il cielo e tutta la natura.
Mira quel cerchio che più li è congiunto;
e sappi che 'l suo muovere è sì tosto
per l'affocato amore ond' elli è punto'. (*Par*., xxviii. 13–45)

[When I turned back and my eyes were struck by what appears on that revolving sphere — if one but contemplates its circling — I saw a point that flashed a beam of light so sharp the eye on which it burns must close against its piercing brightness. The star that, seen from here below, seems smallest would seem a moon if put beside it, as when one star is set beside another. As near, perhaps, as a halo seems to be when it encircles the light that colours it, where the vapor that forms it is most dense, there whirled about that point a ring of fire so quick it would have easily outsped the swiftest sphere circling the universe. This point was encircled by another ring, and that by the third, the third by the fourth, the fourth by the fifth, and the fifth by the sixth. Higher there followed the seventh, now spread so wide that the messenger of Juno, in full circle, would be unable to contain its size. And so, too, the eighth and ninth, each one revolving with diminished speed the farther it was wheeling from the first. And that one least removed from the blazing point of light possessed the clearest flame, because, I think, it was the one that is the most intruthed by it. My lady, who saw me in grave doubt yet eager to know and comprehend, said: 'From that point depend the Heavens and all nature. Observe that circle nearest it, and understand its motion is so swift because it is spurred on by flaming love'.]

The poet's description of nine rings circling the *punto* can be understood in cartographic terms as a mandala, that is, a diagram, chart or geometric pattern that represents the cosmos metaphysically and symbolically. Such devices used for ritual purposes by Indian religions focus the attention of practitioners and adepts and act as an aid to meditation and even trance induction. In a similar manner, the geometric pattern or model that Dante presents in verses 13–45 of *Paradiso* xxviii is meant to serve the reader as an object of contemplation and a tool to focus the attention. In contemplating it, with Beatrice's guidance, we as readers are meant to achieve a transformed perspective on the nature and origin of space, just as the pilgrim's perspective is transformed. This is the deepest sense and purpose of those verses at the beginning of the passage cited that have puzzled the critics: 'E com' io mi rivolsi e furon tocchi / li miei da ciò che pare in quel volume, / quandunque nel suo giro ben s'adocchi' [When I turned back and my eyes were struck by what appears on that revolving sphere — if one but contemplates its circling] (*Par.*, xxviii. 13–15).[18] By contemplating the poet's map of the cosmos as projected on the sphere of the *Primum Mobile* one can achieve insight into the nature and origin of space, that is, by focusing upon the point ('un punto vidi che raggiava lume', l.16) that transcends the finite mind. The point is the first ontological principle for Aristotle, the reflexivity of pure awareness upon which 'depend Heaven and the world of nature' (*Metaphysics* 12.71072bI4). In fact Beatrice says the same things as Aristotle about the *punto*: 'Da quel punto / depende il cielo e tutta la natura' [From that point depend the Heavens and all of nature] (*Par.*, xxviii. 41–42).[19]

To complement and transcend the cartography of the *oikumene* of *Inferno* xxviii and the plan of the terrestrial globe in *Purgatorio* xxviii, Dante provides in *Paradiso* xxviii nothing less than a mandala of the cosmos, as well as an account of its projection and a legend. Dante's picture of the spatial temporal universe includes, also, an account of the angelic hierarchy that providentially governs the universe. Indeed, the geometrical figure or model of the cosmos that Dante employs was probably inspired by a passage from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*

18 See Moevs, p. 141: 'In absolute terms, to turn from the reflection to the source is to turn from the world to its ground; it is to focus the light of awareness on itself in a single point. What is thus revealed is there to be seen whenever (quandunque) one turns upon oneself and looks well'.

19 *Idem*, p. 142.

that described the means by which divine providence expresses its intention through the created world:

> For as the innermost of several circles revolving round the same centre approaches the simplicity of the midmost point, and is, as it were, a pivot round which the exterior circles turn, while the outermost, whirled in ampler orbit, takes in a wider and wider sweep of space in proportion to its departure from the indivisible unity of the centre — while, further, whatever joins and allies itself to the centre is narrowed to a like simplicity, and no longer expands vaguely into space — even so whatsoever departs widely from primal mind is involved more deeply in the meshes of fate, and things are free from fate in proportion as they seek to come nearer to that central pivot […]. (Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, IV, 6)[20]

Dante's utilization of the figure of the circle serves an analogous and parallel purpose to Boethius's. The same principle by which greater proximity to the divine at the centre implies greater adherence to the divine characterizes both Dante's plan of the angelic hierarchy in lines 97–139, and the will of providence in Boethius's formulation. But the metaphysical stakes are higher for Dante insofar as he aims to bring the pilgrim and the reader to an understanding of the nature and the origin of space. For the 'punto' which radiates light represents nothing less than 'the nexus between spatial temporal extension and self-subsistent conscious being'.[21] Nevertheless it is clear from the question that the pilgrim next poses to Beatrice that he still regards spatial extension as an ontological reality:

> E io a lei: 'Se 'l mondo fosse posto
> con l'ordine ch'io veggio in quelle rote,
> sazio m'avrebbe ciò che m'è proposto;
> ma nel mondo sensibile si puote
> veder le volte tanto più divine,
> quant' elle son dal centro più remote.
> Onde, se 'l mio disir dee aver fine
> in questo miro e angelico templo
> che solo amore e luce ha per confine,

20 'Nam ut orbium circa eundem cardinem sese vertentium, qui est intimus, ad simplicitatem medietatis accedit ceterorumque extra locatorum veluti cardo quidam, circa quem versentur, exsistit, extimus vero maiore ambitu rotatus quanto a puncti media individuitate discedit, tanto amplioribus spatiis explicatur, si quod vero illi se medio conectat et societ, in simplicitatem cogitur diffundique ac diffluere cessat, simili ratione, quod longius a prima mente discedit, maioribus fati nexibus implicatur ac tanto aliquid fato liberum est, quanto illum rerum cardinem vicinius petit…'

21 Moevs, p. 141.

udir convienmi ancor come l'essemplo
e l'essemplare non vanno d'un modo,
ché io per me indarno a ciò contemplo'. (*Par*., xxviii. 46–57)

[And I to her: 'If the universe were arranged in the order I see here among these wheels I would be content with what you've set before me. However, in the world of sense we see the farther from the centre they revolve the more divinity is in their orbits. And so, if my desire to know shall gain its end in this rare temple of the angels, which has but light and love for boundaries, then I still need to learn exactly why model and copy fail to follow the same plan, or, using my own powers, I reflect on this in vain'.]

The pilgrim has realized that the model (essemplo) he has seen (the self-subsistent point projecting concentric reflected rings about itself) is the precise inverse of the copy (essemplare) that is the sensible world, in which the Empyrean contains the concentric spheres of creation. In explaining the projection and scale of the map Beatrice effectively resolves the question for Dante and the reader:

Così la donna mia; poi disse: 'Piglia
quel ch'io ti dicerò, se vuo' saziarti;
e intorno da esso t'assottiglia.
Li cerchi corporai sono ampi e arti
secondo il più e 'l men de la virtute
che si distende per tutte lor parti.
Maggior bontà vuol far maggior salute;
maggior salute maggior corpo cape,
s'elli ha le parti igualmente compiute.
Dunque costui che tutto quanto rape
l'altro universo seco, corrisponde
al cerchio che più ama e che più sape:
per che, se tu a la virtù circonde
la tua misura, non a la parvenza
de le sustanze che t'appaion tonde,
tu vederai mirabil consequenza
di maggio a più e di minore a meno,
in ciascun cielo, a süa intelligenza'. (*Par*., xxviii. 61–78)

[My lady said this, then went on: 'Take what I shall tell you if you would be fed, and see you sharpen your wits on it. The material Heavens are wide or narrow according as power, greater or less, is diffused through all their parts. Greater goodness makes for greater blessedness, and

> greater bliss takes on a greater body when all its parts are equal in perfection. This sphere, therefore, which sweeps into its motion the rest of the universe, must correspond to the ring that loves and knows the most, so that, if you apply your measure, not to their appearances but to the powers themselves of the angels that appear to you as circles, you will see a marvelous congruence, larger with more, smaller with less, in each sphere according to its celestial Intelligence.]

The size of the heavenly spheres, according to Beatrice's explanation (*Par.*, xxviii. 61–78) is caused by the causal-formative influence (virtù) they embody. In effect, Beatrice explains, if you 'measure' virtù and not appearances ('la parvenza / de le sustanze') you will find that there is no contradiction between the source and its mirror-image, between the intelligible order and its spatiotemporal reflection. As a result of Beatrice's explanation the pilgrim, and potentially the reader as well, experience a radical shift of perspective. Rather than seeing the ontological hierarchy of being through the reflected image that is space-time, and ascending from the material, located at the centre, to the divine, located at the periphery, we see its truth or source as beginning from the reflexivity of conscious being, at the centre, radiating out as spatial extension.[22]

But to conclude we must return, finally, to consider the representational issues raised by *Paradiso* xxviii and the relationship between cartography and Dante's truth claim for the poem. For commentators have justly called attention to the ambiguity of the verses we have just discussed:

> '… udir convienmi ancor come l'essemplo
> e l'essemplare non vanno d'un modo,
> ché io per me indarno a ciò contemplo' (*Par.*, xxviii. 55–57)

> [then I still need to learn exactly why model and copy fail to follow the same plan, or, using my own powers, I reflect on this in vain.]

The usual interpretation is that the *essemplo* is the model, that is, the supersensory invisible world of the Empyrean and the *essemplare* is the copy, that is, the sensible world. The ambiguity is located in the question of which word refers to the copy and which to that which is being copied, or to put it another way, which (*l'essemplo* or *l'essemplare*) is the map and which the thing mapped. The Bosco-Reggio commentary notes that the

22 *Idem*, p. 144.

majority of the ancient commentators understood *l'essemplo* to be the copy, that is, the physical world, and *l'essemplare* to be the model, the supersensible world, while many modern commentators invert the terms. Bosco-Reggio conclude that it is perhaps best to follow the interpretation of the ancients;[23] Sapegno notes the same ambiguity and reversibility of the terms while observing that either way 'il senso non cambia' [the meaning does not change].[24]

It seems unlikely that Dante would not have been aware of the interchangeability of *l'essemplo* and *l'essemplare* and that he is using it to indicate that the model or map and the reality are both, in the end, representations of a truth that transcends the space-time realm of representation. In fact, in *Paradiso* xiv, as noted earlier, in counterpoint to the T-O map of *Inferno* xxviii, Dante described the vision of Christ's flashing cross as outstripping his representational resources:[25]

> Qui vince la memoria mia lo 'ngegno;
> ché quella croce lampeggiava Cristo,
> sì ch'io non so trovare essempro degno;
> ma chi prende sua croce e segue Cristo,
> ancor mi scuserà di quel ch'io lasso,
> vedendo in quell' albor balenar Cristo. (*Par.*, xiv. 103–08)
>
> [Here my memory outstrips my skill, for that cross so flamed forth Christ that I can find no fit comparison. But he who takes his cross and follows Christ shall yet forgive me what I leave untold, for shining in that dawn I did see Christ.]

Dante's mappings of the cosmos, while truthful, are ultimately inadequate to represent 'the knot or nexus between self-subsistent Intellect-Being and spatiotemporal contingency, which is the knot of the incarnation, or

23 See Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio, glossa to *Par.*, xxviii. 55–57, *Dartmouth Dante Project*, https://dante.dartmouth.edu

24 See Natalino Sapegno, gloss to *Par.*, xxviii. 55–56, *Dartmouth Dante Project*, https://dante.dartmouth.edu

25 The passage anticipates the failure of memory and imagination that will occur at the end of *Paradiso* xxxiii when the poet will attempt to recall and represent his face to face encounter with the triform divinity, likening himself to a mapmaker trying to project the sphere on the flat surface of a map, 'qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s'affige per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova, pensando, quel principio ond' elli indige' [Like the geometer who fully applies himself to square the circle and, for all his thought, cannot discover the principle he lacks] (*Par.*, xxxiii. 133–35).

revelation, of Christ and of the *Comedy*'s poetics'.[26] For the poet 'can find no fit comparison' ('non so trovare essempro degno') for a truth that lies beyond the representational capabilities of the map and of writing.

Why cartography, then? Historians of cartography Denis Wood and John Fels observe in *The Natures of Maps* that: 'Insisting that something is there is a uniquely powerful way of insisting that something is. Mapped things — no matter how conceptually daunting — possess such extraordinary credibility that they're capable of propelling into popular discourse abstruse abstractions cantilevered from abstruse abstractions: high pressure cells, El Niño, seafloor spreading, thermohaline circulation'.[27] I believe that Dante, on the cusp of the transition from a medieval place-based cosmos to early modern space, between the representational genres of the ideological mythopoetic cartography of medieval *mappamundi* and the empirical 'scientific' mappings of modern nautical charts, recognized the power of maps of whatever genre or representational idiom to assert a truth that lay behind and beyond them. He therefore made cosmographic cartography on the axis of the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights one of the pillars of his rhetorical programme in support of the truth claim of the poem. In the variety of cartographic writing that features so prominently along the axis of the 'perfect' Twenty-Eights, in the *sermo humilis* mappings of the Italian peninsula, including even the humblest and most obscure of places; in the poem's Global Positioning System that tags and triangulates the locations of Crete, Jerusalem, and Purgatory; and in the mandala-like mapping of the cosmos in *Paradiso* xxviii, the *Commedia* came to possess something of the extraordinary credibility of maps.

26 Moevs, p. 144.

27 Denis Wood and John Fels, *The Natures of Maps: Cartographic Constructions of the Natural World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 7.

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