

Saturn's Sphere: Astrology, Mythology, and the Contemplatives in Dante's *Paradiso* 21-22

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Abstract: In the arrangement of souls in Dante's *Paradiso*, the poet places the most blessed category of souls, the contemplatives, in the sphere of Saturn, a planet generally considered to be "The Greater Infortune" in medieval astrology (*Paradiso* 21-22). This thesis asks and answers the question why this should be so. Scholarly literature on Dante has rarely dealt with this question in depth. Commentators since the fourteenth century have typically offered a brief explanation, and one often finds these explanations more or less expanded upon in the tradition of *Lecturae Dantis*. But to my knowledge, the only prolonged consideration of the nature of Saturn in *Paradiso* is the relevant chapter of Richard Kay's *Dante's Christian Astrology*, which tends to focus more on details than on the larger question. My thesis is that when fully examined the medieval associations of Saturn actually constitute an atmosphere peculiarly appropriate to contemplative hermits, and an understanding of this "Saturnine atmosphere" will enable us to read rightly both the two speaking figures of the cantos, Peter Damian and Benedict of Nursia, as well as the two lesser figures who are named as present but remain silent, Macarius and Romuald. In order to develop this thesis, I consider Dante's sources, both confirmed and surmised, in order to develop a portrait of Saturn as he was understood by the fourteenth century, employing contemporary definitions and etymologies of the appropriate terms. I look at *Paradiso's* intertextual relations with those authors, ancient, late antique, and medieval, in connection with the Saturnine associations they furnish. I use those results to demonstrate the nature of the Saturnine atmosphere developed in *Paradiso* 21-22, comparing the images and qualities of Saturn with the characterizations and images of Saturn's sphere in the *Commedia*. Then I consider the lives, writings, and depictions in the appropriate cantos of the four contemplatives that Dante identifies, demonstrating how they relate to the Saturnine atmosphere and associations and why the poet might have chosen each of them for inclusion in Saturn's sphere. Special attention is given to the identity of Macarius, as there are at least three possibilities and Dante does not specify in any way which one he is thinking of. I find that the medieval understanding of Saturn is truly integral to the atmosphere and events of *Par.* 21-22, and that there are many examples of this in the lives, writings, and role in the *Commedia* of the four souls in question. These findings significantly deepen our understanding of these cantos and their connection with the

architectonics of *Paradiso*. Future research might focus in more depth on one of the four contemplatives, particularly the much neglected Macarius, consider to a greater degree the role of Saturnine allusions and imagery in other parts of the *Commedia* and perhaps even in Dante's lyrics, and treat more profound themes connected with Saturn and *Paradiso* in light of critical theory, such as the work of Walter Benjamin and Mikhail Bakhtin.

Table of Contents

1. “the Love which moves the sun and other stars”	
— Introduction	1
2. “its beloved leader beneath whom every wickedness lay dead”	
—The Astrology and Mythology of Saturn	10
3. “We have risen to the seventh splendor”	
—Dante’s Saturn	30
4. “And that one which stopped nearest to us”	
—Peter Damian	44
5. “the greatest and most shining of those pearls”	
—St. Benedict of Nursia	58
6. “Here is Macarius, here is Romualdus”	
—Macarius and Romuald	70
7. “why in this wheel the sweet symphony of Paradise is silent”	
—Conclusion	86
8. Works Cited	88

I.

“the Love which moves the sun and other stars”

Introduction

The *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) both narrates and signifies, in his own celebrated words, the “cammin di nostra vita,” that is, the road or journey of “our life” (*Inferno* 1.1).¹ At the literal level the poet does this through a rich threefold description of the realms of the afterlife according to the eschatology of the medieval Western Church—Hell (*Inferno*), Purgatory (*Purgatorio*), and Heaven (*Paradiso*).² The aim of this thesis will be to elucidate one small part of one of these realms, the circle of the contemplatives in Heaven (*Paradiso* 21-22), by reference to both the astrological and mythological associations of the cosmic location that Dante assigns them, the sphere of Saturn, as well as to the identity, lives, works, and role in *Paradiso* of the contemplatives themselves.³ In other words, the medieval associations of Saturn constitute an atmosphere peculiarly appropriate to contemplatives, and an understanding of that atmosphere will enable us to read rightly both the two speaking figures of the cantos, St. Peter Damian (the representative of Saturn’s sphere in Canto 21) and St. Benedict of Nursia (the Saturnine representative in Canto 22), as well as the two lesser figures who are named as present but remain silent, Saints Macarius and Romuald (*Par.* 22.49). Collectively, this group of souls is too often

¹ All quotations from the *Divine Comedy* are taken from the Italian edition and prose translation of Charles Singleton, *The Divine Comedy: Italian Text and Translation*, 6 vols., by Dante Alighieri, commentary by Charles Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1970-75). Singleton notes that his text is “substantially that established by Giorgio Petrocchi” (Singleton, “Note on the Italian Text and the Translation,” *Inferno* 371). Citations will give the cantica, canto and line number(s).

² I acknowledge that the expression “literal level” is rather fraught when it comes to the *Commedia* since the problem of the poem’s intention and construal as allegory constitutes the central question in Dante criticism these days. If we are to believe Dante’s purported *Epistle to Can Grande* 11, the literal level is the “state of souls after death,” but of course this creates a bifurcation of meaning (Robert Haller, “The Letter to Can Grande,” *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, trans. & ed. Robert S. Haller [Lincoln, N.E.: U of Nebraska, 1973], 101). Dante the hero, the pilgrim through these realms, is not dead, suggesting a narrative level distinct from this signifying aim. See Jeremy Tambling, “Dante and Benjamin: Melancholy and Allegory,” *Exemplaria* 4.2 (1992), 351.

³ Nevertheless, I hold that Dante’s *Commedia* constitutes a unified poetic work, though perhaps only clearly so in retrospect, and that the quest to understand a part will necessarily involve glancing at other parts of the whole.

rather neglected, but as Saturn is the highest of the seven planetary spheres, so too this group deserves more scrutiny as the highest of the blessed souls.

To this end, an overview of Dante's cosmology seems warranted, both to facilitate a grasp of the context to this study of *Par.* 21-22 as well as to recall and make clear the essential unity of the whole *Commedia*. For it is no accident that so many editions and translations of the poem include maps. C. S. Lewis describes the cosmology of the medieval imagination in terms of a syncretistic "Model of the Universe" that constitutes both a "sublime achievement" to stand beside the *Summa Theologia* of Thomas Aquinas and the *Commedia* itself, but also the "central work" in which both *Summa* and *Commedia* "were embedded, to which they constantly referred, from which they drew a great deal of their strength."⁴ While some oversimplification is necessary, the universe of the *Commedia* was in most general respects common to all Western Christian thinkers of the fourteenth century.⁵ Here then is Jorge Luis Borges's elegant summary:⁶

Dante's universe is described by Ptolemaic astronomy and Christian theology. Earth is a motionless sphere;...Nine concentric spheres spin around the earth; the first seven are the planetary heavens (those of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn); the eighth is the Heaven of the Fixed Stars [i.e. the constellations]; the ninth, the Crystalline Heaven, also called the Primum Mobile. This is surrounded by the empyrean, where the Rose of the Just opens, immeasurable, around a point, which is God. Predictably, the choirs that make up the Rose are nine in number....Such are the broad outlines of the general configuration of Dante's world,

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Canto, 2002), 10, 12.

⁵ For more nuance, see Edward Grant, "Cosmology," *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: U of Chicago), 265-302. Grant foregrounds the various issues at controversy among the natural philosophers of the day.

⁶ A brief primary source that includes much of the Model can be found in the English translation of parts of Honorius Augustodunensis's *De imagine mundi libri tres*, "A Picture of the World," in John F. Wippel & Allan B. Wolter, eds., *Medieval Philosophy: From St. Augustine to Nicholas of Cusa* (N.Y.: The Free P, 1969), 175-86. Lewis has an even briefer summary of the Model's material layout alone in "Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Canto, 2007), 45. See also Ernst Cassirer's summary of the philosophy of the Model—with particular reference to Dionysius the Areopagite—in *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale, 1946), 130-32.

which is subordinate, as the reader will have observed, to the preeminence of the numbers 1 and 3 and of the circle. The Demiurge or Craftsman of the *Timaeus*, a book mentioned by Dante (*Convivio* 3.5; *Paradiso* 4.49) considered rotation the most perfect form of movement, and the sphere the most perfect body; this dogma, which Plato's Demiurge shared with Xenophanes and Parmenides,⁷ governs the geography of the three worlds traversed by Dante.⁸

To put a couple of finishing touches on Borges's portrait, we should also note two things. First, the reference to "concentric spheres" denotes not simply imaginary paths traversed by the heavenly bodies as they circle the earth, but the hollow, transparent globes like nesting dolls upon which the bodies move.⁹ Second, we must imagine a marked boundary at the sphere of the Moon. Above this, the heavenly bodies are "eternal and blessed beings" whose "movement is [nevertheless] consistent with their state of imperturbability," as the Neoplatonist Calcidius says in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* 5.76.¹⁰ Below it, "there is every kind of movement and change, . . . For birth and death are in this region, also increase,

⁷ Though he cites no texts, Borges no doubt refers here to the pre-Socratic philosophers, Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570-c. 478 BCE) and Parmenides of Elea (late 6th-early 5th c. BCE), often identified by ancient authors as Xenophanes's pupil or friend. In his characteristically brief essay, "Pascal's Sphere," Borges treats both of them—along with Empedocles of Sicily (c. 494-c. 434 BCE) in relation to the celebrated maxim, "God is an intelligible sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Susan Jill Levine, & Eliot Weinberger [N.Y.: Penguin, 1999], 351). Borges finds the proposition in Alanus Insulis: "Deus est spera intelligibilis cuius centrum ubique, circumferential nusquam" (*Textes Inédits*, ed. Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny [Paris: Librairie Philosophique, J. Vrin, 1965], 297). Alanus's proposition first appears in the Hermetic *Book of Twenty-Four Philosophers*. Brian Copenhaver detects an "Empedoclean ring" to it, though Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles alike do no more in the extant fragments than to contribute to the concatenation of concepts involved with their speculations on sphericity in relation cosmology and the divine (Brian P. Copenhaver, Introduction, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation, with notes and introduction* [Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1997], xlvi). Xenophanes's contributions seem more to do with second-hand reports of his philosophy than with actual extant fragments, but for the relevant passages in English translation related to all three, see Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 1987), 97, 99; 135; 178-79.

⁸ Borges 268-9.

⁹ Lewis, *Discarded* 96. See also Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (N.Y.: Vintage, 1959), 79-82. Earlier, Kuhn notes "vestiges" of this belief even in Copernicus: "In the title of Copernicus' great work, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium*, the 'orbs' or spheres are not the planets themselves but rather the concentric spherical shells in which the planets and stars are set" (59).

¹⁰ Calcidius, *Comm. on Tim.* 5.76; in Calcidius, *On Plato's Timaeus*, ed. & trans. John Magee (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 2016), 243, 245. Calcidius (4th c. CE) was incalculably important for medieval thought. Not only did he pass on the only Latin translation of a Platonic dialogue before the Renaissance, the *Timaeus*, but his accompanying "commentary" inevitably shaped how it was understood. See Lewis, *Discarded* 49-60, and John Magee's introduction to his text and translation (Calcidius vii-xxvi).

and diminution, every kind of transformation, and transposition from place to place....”¹¹ The sublunary world is subject to Fortune, she whom the poet in *Inferno* calls the Earth’s “general minister and guide” corresponding with the celestial intelligences that guide the stars (*Inf.* 7.78).¹²

This science is of course Pre-Copernican, although the Primum Mobile as the source of the lower spheres’ motion had not been dispensed with even by Galileo, while the physical spheres themselves had been.¹³ But Dante’s cosmology represents far more than an outdated astronomical theory. Thomas Kuhn argues that the Christian symbolism that Dante weds to this “literal Aristotelian universe adapted to the epicycles of Hipparchus” imparts to it a “pregnant meaning” that made it appear as though the universe “could have no other structure.”¹⁴ In other words, this cosmos is heavy with child of an ultimately theological significance, for it is “Divine Love [that] first set those beautiful things in motion” (*Inf.* 1.39-40).¹⁵ Even the Primum Mobile, the ninth sphere added to the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic map by Muslim astronomers in order to explain the precession of the equinoxes and the motion of the pole of the heavens, became more than simply a way to solve a scientific problem.¹⁶ It is first and foremost the divine source of the motion passed down through the spheres successively by the “celestial movers,” i.e., the ranks of angels described in the *Celestial Hierarchy* of St. Dionysius the Areopagite: seraphim, cherubim, thrones,

¹¹ Calcidius, *Comm on Tim.* 5.76 (243).

¹² Colui lo cui saver tutto trascende
 fece li cieli e diè lor chi conduce
 sì ch’ogne parte ad ogne parte splende,
 distribuendo igualmente la luce.
 Similemente a li splendor mondani
 ordinò general ministra e duce... (*Inf.* 7.73-8)

Less important for our purposes are two further points noted by Lewis: the medieval view of “space” as entirely illuminated by the Sun and radiant with light is nothing like our concept of a “pitch-black and dead-cold vacuity” (indeed, the medievals expressly denied the possibility of any vacuum in space whatsoever); and the “music of the spheres” with which for them it is likewise filled is similarly alien to our own modern conception of “space” (Lewis, *Discarded* 111, 112).

¹³ See for instance the 1613 “Letter to Castelli,” in Maurice A. Finocchiaro, trans. & ed, *The Trial of Galileo: Essential Documents* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 46. According to Kuhn, Tycho Brahe (d. 1601) had already done away with the spheres (Kuhn 205-6).

¹⁴ Kuhn 112.

¹⁵ “l’amor divino / mosse di prima quelle cose belle” (*Inf.* 1.39-40; 4).

¹⁶ Kuhn 112 n.

dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, and angels (*CH* 6.2).¹⁷ Dante himself makes the angelic role in celestial motion explicit in his philosophical handbook for the laity, the *Convivio*, but he also speaks of the “most fervent appetite” and “desire” of the spheres for each other as the source of their revolutions.¹⁸ In this way, the Divine Love becomes not just an impersonal “first mover,” but the fundamental principle that animates the heavens. Furthermore, the love or desire that moves the stars and planets also serves as a context for the doctrine of their influences upon the sublunary sphere. Calcidius insists that all of the effects characteristic of the sublunary sphere “originate in planetary movement.”¹⁹ Each of the planets has its own distinct effects upon the world below, and these are the basis of astrology and of the traditions that shaped Dante’s depictions of each sphere. Their influence is represented as God’s light subsequently shaped by the angelic intelligences assigned to each of them.²⁰

¹⁷ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Celestial Hierarchy* 6.2; in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid & Paul Rorem (N.Y.: Paulist, 1987), 60-61. Translation of the terms for the middle triad can vary greatly. I have given the names as they appear in Singleton’s rendering of *Par.* 28, where Dante advisedly changes the order he had given in *Convivio* to conform to that of Dionysius (*Par.* 28.99, 104, 122-26; cf. *Convivio* 2.5.6). The Dionysian hierarchy in its whole conception is a fundamental component of Dante’s theological cosmology as well as that of the entire Middle Ages:

The medieval thinkers were divided into various schools....Nevertheless there was a common center of thought that remained firm and unchangeable for many centuries. To grasp the unity of medieval thought there is perhaps no better and easier way than to study the two books *Peri tes ouranias ierarchias* and *Peri tes ekkleisastikes ierarchias* (On the Celestial Hierarchy and On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy). (Cassirer, *Myth*, 130-31)

I may as well state up front that I prefer to dispense with the common moniker “Pseudo-Dionysius” for the mysterious author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Not that I am convinced that St. Paul’s convert in Acts 17:34 actually penned the treatises and letters of that corpus, but the scholarly shorthand has nearly become a proper name in its own right, one that no more refers to a “real” person than the plainer “Dionysius.”

¹⁸ Dante, *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, ed. & trans. Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2021), 66.

¹⁹ Calcidius, *Comm. on Tim.* 5.76 (243).

²⁰ While Dante is certainly not alone in conceiving of the angels as movers of the heavenly bodies, Stephen Bemrose demonstrates, “There can be no doubt that Dante’s acceptance of the...identification is a highly enthusiastic one which leads him to a more extensive and explicit conception of angelic motor function than is found among his contemporaries” (Stephen Bemrose, *Dante’s Angelic Intelligences: Their Importance in the Cosmos and in Pre-Christian Religion*, [Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1983], 89). Indeed, Bemrose shows that on this account the poet introduces an Aristotelian/Averroist identification of the substance of the intelligences with their activity that contradicts not only Dionysius and Aquinas, but Dante’s own comments elsewhere in the *Convivio* and *Paradiso* (78-86).

The final piece of the puzzle, which serves to connect stars, planets, human beings, and elements themselves at the physical level, are the four contrary qualities: hot, cold, moist, and dry.²¹ These two pairs are the links that bind all of the physical world together, following the principle of the *tertium quid* in Calcidius's *Timaeus* commentary.²² In other words, beginning with the four elements themselves, the lowest, earth, is both dry and cold, the next, water, is cold and moist, air is moist and hot, and lastly, fire is hot and dry: earth and water share the quality of coldness, water and air moistness, air and fire hotness. The qualities are present in the human body in the form of the four humors, which produce the four temperaments of melancholic, phlegmatic, sanguine, and choleric. Although the stars themselves do not possess physical qualities, two of the contraries are ascribed to the influence of each planet and each constellation of the Zodiac, which is thus in turn connected to one of the elements of the sublunary world and one of the temperaments.²³

Thus we see that in the medieval Model, there exists a whole *scientia* by means of which human beings “used to describe the various paths of the planets...and relate human ethics and the whole of human life to the patterns of the celestial order” (Boethius, *De consolazione* 1.4pr.15-17).²⁴ One of Dante's great feats is to make use of all of these principles in populating the three realms with the dead of ancient literature, the Hebrew Bible, the Christian New Testament, the history of the Church, and his own contemporaries and even family members. In Hell, Dante deploys them according to a complicated

²¹ The four seasons and cardinal directions also partake of the contraries, thus exhibiting correspondences with the two constitutive elements in the earthly chain of being—time and space. See the chart with their names in Greek in Cassirer, *The Warburg Years: Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven, C.T.: Yale, 2013), 70. The Venerable Bede establishes parallels between the seasons (*tempora*) and the elements on the one hand, and the humors, the four temperaments, and the four ages of life in the human microcosm on the other. See Bede, *De temporum ratione* 35, in Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool U, 2004), 100.

²² Calcidius, *Comm. in Tim.* 1.8 (133).

²³ Grant 287.

²⁴ Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* 1.4pr.15-17, in Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts (N.Y.: Penguin, 1999), 9. Cf. the Latin: “cum mihi siderum vias radio describeres, cum mores nostros totiusque vitae rationem ad caelestis ordinis exempla formares” (Boethius, *The Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. & trans. H. F. Steward, E. K. Rand, & S. J. Tester [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1973], 146). Compare this aspect of the Model with the mythical conception of space described by Cassirer (*Warburg* 327).

Scholastic arrangement of sins through nine descending circles. In Purgatory, the souls of the dead wind their way up a mountain through terraces structured according to the Seven Deadly Sins. In Heaven, he displays them according to character within the spheres of the seven planets. As we shall see, this structural plan creates deep links between the character of the blessed souls in Saturn and the nature of the planet itself.

In a seminal article of 1967, Francis X. Newman developed an analogy between the tripartite structure of Dante's *Commedia* and St. Augustine's exegesis of 2 Cor. 12: 2, 4.²⁵ Augustine interprets the Pauline passage—"I know a man...caught up to the third heaven....caught up into paradise"²⁶—as referring to three "modes of human awareness:" "*visio corporalis*,...knowledge by means of the external senses....*visio spiritualis* or imaginative, knowledge by means of the imagination....[and *visio*] *intellectualis*, the direct cognition of realities such as God, the angels, caritas, etc., which have neither corporeal substance nor corporeal shape." In this way, St. Paul's "paradise" becomes identified with the *visio intellectualis* and then maps poetically onto Dante's *Paradiso*, which in turn constitutes an even more literal "map" of the third heaven.²⁷

Of the three canticas of the *Commedia*, only the third, *Paradiso*, presents the souls in locations that the poet himself tells us are not corporeal places but rather (even within the context of the poem) heuristic fictions intended to guide the understanding. Thus Beatrice explains to the pilgrim, "These [souls] showed themselves here, not because this sphere is allotted to them, but to afford sign of the

²⁵ Francis X. Newman, "St. Augustine's Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*," *MLN* 81. (1967), 59. William Anderson refers to the same analogy in a more general way in *Dante the Maker* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 299-300. Giuseppe Mazzotta notes that Newman's use of the analogy was originally suggested by Murray Wright Bundy's work on the medieval theory of the imagination in *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1993), 261, n. 4.

²⁶ "Scio hominem...raptum eiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum...raptus est in paradisum" (2 Cor. 12:2, 4).

²⁷ Despite Newman's achievement in developing the analogy between St. Augustine's three visions and Dante's three canticas, Margaret Mills Chiarenza observes that he "seems hesitant in his application of the concept of intellectual vision to the *Paradiso*" ("The Imageless Vision and Dante's *Paradiso*," *Dante Studies* 90 (1972), 78. Chiarenza's article is a notable remedy for this hesitance.

celestial grade that is least exalted” (*Par.* 4.37-39).²⁸ While the poet has borrowed this device from *Timaeus* 41e,²⁹ Beatrice goes on to compare the appearance of the saints in their respective spheres to the divine anthropomorphisms in Scripture, explaining that they present themselves in this way as a condescension to the human “faculty [ingegno]”, “since only through sense perception does it apprehend that which it afterwards makes fit for the intellect” (*Par.* 4.41-2).³⁰

But whereas Plato inspired the device, Dionysius inspired the explanation. The doctrine of divine condescension to human understanding through “sacred veils,” (inevitably) material symbols for spiritual realities, is central to the theology of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, both with respect to the Godhead itself, in the treatise on the *Divine Names*, and with respect to the nine ranks of angels in the treatise on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and Aquinas prominently adopts it with reference to Dionysius at the outset of the *Summa*.³¹ Acknowledgment of this exegetical tradition reveals the poet’s association of blessed souls with particular planets as itself a kind of allegory, one which demands a careful, contemplative reading. With this association Dante creates a wealth of veils hiding the significance of the beatified, a richness of symbol, allusion, and detail—a *collatio*,³² to use a medieval term—easily missed by modern readers and often only hinted at in the standard commentaries.³³

²⁸ “Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita / sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno / de la celestial c’ha men salita” (*Par.* 4.37-39).

²⁹ Made clear by the reference to “Plato’s teaching” in l. 24 and to that dialogue in particular in l. 49 (*Par.* 4).

³⁰ “però che solo da sensate apprende / ciò che fa poscia d’intelletto degno” (*Par.* 4.41-2). John Freccero also calls attention to the relationship between the poet’s planetary conceit and the discussion of Plato’s *Timaeus* in the same passage of *Par.* 4; see John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1986), 223-4. Chiarenza notes that the hierarchy of the *Paradiso* is “presented as an equivocation...as an artificial structure which does not exist outside of the momentary need for it” (80).

³¹ Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1.4 (52), and *Celestial Hierarchy* 1.3 (146). Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* I, q. 1, a. 9, resp., in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, comp. Jake E. Stief (n.p.: Stief, n.d.), 8. Alexander Golitzin argues that the passage elaborating the doctrine of the sacred veils in the *Celestial Hierarchy* “is perhaps the most crucial of the entire [Dionysian] corpus, a summary of the Dionysian project” (*Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* [Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1994], 149).

³² I use *collatio* in the sense established by Mary Carruthers—“a basic memory technique called ‘*collatio*,’ ‘gathering,’ which builds up a network, a ‘texture,’ of associations to show a common theme” (*The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge, 2002], 36).

³³ To take just one example, the subject of Saturn himself, Grandgent begins his “Argument” for *Par.* 21 by pointing out that cold Saturn “symbolizes the spiritual state of contemplative minds,” but never explains how he does so

(C.H. Grandgent, ed. & annotated, *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, rev. ed. [Boston: Heath, 1933], 846). Singleton connects Saturn as ruler of the Golden Age with the gold of the ladder of *Par.* 21.29-30, and the ladder itself with contemplation, but says nothing about any direct connection between Saturn and contemplative souls (*Par.* II, 21.26-27, 29-30). (Henceforth Singleton's commentaries will be cited as *Inf.* II, *Pur.* II, and *Par.* II followed by the canto and line (when reference is not made to these in the text of the thesis) in Arabic numerals.) More recently, Anthony Esolen says nothing at all about Saturn in his notes on the two cantos for the popular Modern Library Classics edition of the *Commedia* (*Paradise: A New Translation*, by Dante Alighieri, trans. & ed. Anthony Esolen [N.Y.: Modern Library, 2004], 459-64).

2.

“its beloved leader beneath whom every wickedness lay dead”

The Astrology and Mythology of Saturn

The stars and heavens are central to the *Paradiso*, and in fact to the entire *Commedia*. Aside from the frequent references to sun, moon, planets, and constellations throughout all three canticas, Dante’s readers have often noted the striking fact that each one ends with the word *stelle*, inspiring John Freccero’s observation that the poem’s stars “represent the goal of the itinerary of the mind.”³⁴ None of the *stelle* can be seen from the dark underworld of *Inferno*, of course, but Dante strives to make up for this fact by frequent reference to their positions throughout *Purgatorio*.³⁵ In *Paradiso* the pilgrim can observe them up close, reveling in the richness of allusion to each of the planetary loci through which he ascends. The poet already acknowledges the commonplace doctrine of astrological influences in *Pur.* 26.73-81, and refers to it under the term “the virtue of the holy spheres” in *Par.* 2.127.³⁶ More unusual is his ascription of the actual source of stellar influence to the angelic intelligences who move the spheres rather than to the heavenly bodies themselves.³⁷

Dante, however, chooses the second of the two Saturn cantos of the *Paradiso* for “the most eloquent witness to the belief in the influence of the heavenly bodies on human character that is found anywhere in the poem.”³⁸

³⁴ Freccero, *Dante* 226. Freccero borrows the phrase from Bonaventure’s contemplative treatise, *Itinerarium mentis*.

³⁵ See for example *Pur.* 1.19-21; 9.1-6; and 18.79-81.

³⁶ “la vertu d’i santi giri” (*Par.* 2.127). Noting that astral influence, like everything else in the universe, originates with God, Freccero aptly refers to the whole passage as “the cosmic model of divine influence first presented in *Paradiso* 2 [ll. 112-38]” (Freccero, *Dante* 81).

³⁷ Bemrose 95-6.

³⁸ Singleton, *Par.* II 22.112-23.

O glorious stars [i.e. Gemini], O light impregnated with mighty power [*virtù*], from which I derive all my genius, whatsoever it may be, with you was rising and with you was hiding himself he who is father of every mortal life [i.e. the Sun] when I first felt the air of Tuscany;... (*Par.* 22.112-17)³⁹

The placement of the apostrophe just after the encounters of Saturn suggests a unique connection between that sphere and astrology itself, as we shall see. But this is natal astrology, and, as Beatrice explains in *Par.* 4.37-42, the astrology involved in the spheres of *Paradiso* is symbolic in a different way. The figures who appear in Saturn's sphere are there not because they were literally born under Saturn (as Dante was born under Gemini), but because Saturn's qualities tell us something about the souls encountered there.⁴⁰ To explore those qualities, the "veils" of Saturn's sphere, we naturally begin with the view of the planet found in medieval astrology. This section will summarize and synthesize the Saturnine qualities in terms of their relevance to Dante, and then go on to explore relevant aspects of Saturn's mythology, as well as the allegorizing interpretation of Saturn by the Neoplatonists, to show how

³⁹ O gloriose stelle, o lume pregno
di grant virtù, dal quale io riconosco
tutto, qual che si sia, il mio ingegno,
con voi nasceva e s'ascondeva vosco
quelli ch'è padre d'ogne mortal vita,
quand' io senti' di prima l'aere toscano;...(*Par.* 22. 112-17)

⁴⁰ See Georg Rabuse, "Saturne et l'échelle de Jacob," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 45 (1978), 10-12. Thus, the fourteenth-century commentator Francesco da Buti (c. 1395) refers to Dante's "pretense" and the "fictions he makes" around such astrological symbolism (Francesco da Buti, comm. *Par.* 21.13, at the *Dartmouth Dante Project*, dante.dartmouth.edu, henceforth *Dartmouth*). The qualities of Saturn are manifest in what Mazzotta calls "symbolic bonds of solidarity joining stars and the human soul" (*Vision* 161). The choice of Gemini for the poet's apostrophe may be influenced by more than Dante's horoscope. While Gemini is ruled by Mercury rather than Saturn, there actually is a connection between the Twins under whom Dante was born on the one hand and the sphere allotted to the contemplatives on the other. Zygmunt Baranski quotes Bernardus Silvestris's *Commentary* on Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* to show that Castor and Pollux were read as an allegory of the active and contemplative lives (Zygmunt G. Baranski, "Canto XXII," *Lectura Dantis Turicensis, Vol. III: Paradiso*, ed. Georges Güntert & Michelangelo Picone [Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002], 350). See also Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography: From Roman North Africa to the School of Chartres, A.D. 433-1177* (Gainesville, F.L.: UP of Florida, 1994), 477-78. On the assignments of the constellations of the Zodiac to the seven planets, see Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum naturale* 15.40, "De Domibus planetarum in duodecim signis: et earum exaltationibus," col. 186. Saturn's proper Zodiac signs are Capricorn and Aquarius.

these three strands of the medieval inheritance from Antiquity stand behind Cantos 21 and 22 of *Paradiso*.

First, however, a brief word about the terms “astrology” and “astronomy” seems necessary. A great teacher and mystic whom Dante locates in the sphere of the Sun, Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096-1141), offers a common, rather scholastic distinction between the two in terms of their interest in different aspects of the stars: astronomy investigates and treats the stars in themselves, whereas astrology concerns itself more with the influence of the stars on earthly life and events.⁴¹ That said, in practice medieval writers used the two terms synonymously (Dante himself preferred “astrology” when referring to any astral science), and all believed to some degree or another in the occult influences of the stars and planets.⁴² That these observations apply to Dante as much as to any other contemporary figure is evident from *Pur.* 16.67-81 and *Par.* 8.97-148.⁴³ Thus, while certain practicing astrologers are damned as fraudulent diviners in *Inf.* 20, in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* Dante “restores [astrology] to its proper place in Christian cosmology and ethics,” much like the sheer increase in reference to the stars after the emergence from Hell.⁴⁴ Naturally, in the scheme of divine providence and human free will, astrology’s

⁴¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 2.11, in *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (N.Y.: Columbia, 1991), 68. Albertus Magnus makes the same distinction in *De fato* a. 4 (Mazzotta, *Vision* 161).

⁴² Richard Kay, *Dante’s Christian Astrology* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1994), 1-2. Lewis disposes of any puzzlement at the notion of Christian astrology in *Discarded Image* 103-5. It seems to me the first sense he notes in which the two really are incompatible, “the lucrative, and politically undesirable, practice of astrologically grounded predictions,” more than adequately explains the presence of certain astrologers in *Inferno* (103). See also Cassirer’s comments in *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Angelico, 2020), 99-100. Thus, St. Gregory the Great writes, “Now the earth is rendered fruitful by the air, while the air is governed by the quality of heaven” (*Moralia in Job* 4.28.54; St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job, or Morals on the Book of Job*, Vol. 1—Parts I and II, trans. J. Bliss [n.p.: Ex Fontibus, 2012], 204).

⁴³ Kay 2. *Pur.* 16.67-81 is a passage against astrological determinism that nevertheless insists, “The heavens initiate your movements [*Lo cielo i vostri movimenti inizia*]” (*Pur.* 16.73). *Par.* 8.97-148 similarly assumes the reality of celestial influence but points out that God exercises his providence through the stars: “Were this not so, the heavens which you are traversing would produce their effects in such wise that they would be not works of art but ruins [*Se ciò non fosse, il ciel che tu cammine / produrrebbe sì li suoi effetti, / che non sarebb’arti, ma ruine*]” (*Par.* 8.106-8).

Kay’s work, particularly in “Appendix 1: Bibliography,” also furnishes a thorough overview and treatment of the various astrological authorities that lie behind the poet’s astrology (261-82). Curiously, however, Kay neglects to mention *Par.* 22.112-223 when citing examples of Dante’s belief in stellar influence.

⁴⁴ Theodore Otto Wedel, *The Mediaeval Attitude toward Astrology, Particularly in England* (n.p.: Archon, 1968), 80.

proper place necessarily excludes any sense of determinism, as Marco the Lombard makes clear to the pilgrim in *Pur.* 16.66-84.⁴⁵

Rejecting the notion of any astrological determinism over the human will, however, still leaves a great sway to the stars' influence over external events and the circumstances of our births. Traditionally, the "wandering star" or planet of Saturn was thus long held to be *Infortuna Major*, "the Greater Bad Fortune," a proximate cause of ruin and catastrophe.⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva calls him "the planet of spirit and thought," but he did not start out with such tranquil associations.⁴⁷ The associations, influences, and effects of the planet and, as we shall see, the mythology of the god that fed into that astrology, were dark and terrible alike, and for this reason the literary task of coupling Saturn's traditional qualities with his role as the highest planet and the sphere of those closest to God "presented the greatest challenge to Dante."⁴⁸ A first glance at the astrological and mythological lore does not suggest Saturn's sphere as an appropriate locus for the most blessed category of saints, and accordingly Dante is up to something unusual in Cantos 21-22 of *Paradiso*.⁴⁹

Dante's "supreme authority" was Ptolemy (c. 100-c. 170), the only astrological authority of the *Inferno* found in Limbo rather than Hell proper.⁵⁰ Although he is most well-known for the more "astronomical" *Almagest*, here we are concerned with the more "astrological" *Tetrabiblos*, known to the medieval West in at least two different Latin translations as the *Quadripartitum*. Ptolemy's first reference

⁴⁵ Jean Seznec observes that in the Middle Ages "the astrological theory of causation remains in force as an intellectual concept; even the greatest minds do not repudiate it entirely. They do of course see that omnipotence of the stars could constitute a threat to human liberty, but like the apologists and the Fathers, they are satisfied with defining the limits of this power; they do not deny its existence" (*The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, trans. Barbara F. Sessions [N.Y.: Pantheon, 1953], 48).

⁴⁶ Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, & Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*, New ed., ed. Philippe Despoix & Georges Leroux (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's U, 2019), 140. Henceforth cited as Klibansky. In the text I will refer to the authors as Klibansky *et alii*.

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (N.Y.: Columbia, 1989), 8.

⁴⁸ Kay 218.

⁴⁹ This section is heavily indebted to Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl.

⁵⁰ Mary Alworth Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, New & rev. ed. (n.p.: Alpha, 2021), 149. Cf. *Inf.* 4.142; 44, 45. Unfortunately, Mary Orr confines her survey of Dante's sources largely to those concerned with "astronomy" in the modern sense, such as Alfraganus's epitome of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, rather than those concerned with such "astrological" matters as planetary qualities, like Ptolemy's *Quadripartitum* or Albumasar's *Introductio* (Orr 145-56). She clearly adheres to the anachronistic distinction Kay has decried.

to Saturn is in *Quad.* 1.4, where he describes the planet's qualities as "chiefly to cool and, moderately, to dry." In other words, of the four contraries, he is cold and dry, the qualities associated with the element of earth and the metal lead, for which reason he is associated with great weight. But also, in the human body, the cold and dry qualities become humor of μελαίνα χολή, "black bile," whence we get the melancholy temperament associated with Saturn. Next Ptolemy repeats the traditional belief in Saturn's maleficent influence in *Quad.* 1.5, since of the four humors the cold and the dry "are destructive and passive," and through them "all things, again, are separated and destroyed." In 2.8, Ptolemy describes what events are caused by the influence of which planets. Thus the list of Saturnine effects, mostly catastrophic, includes: destruction by cold, long illnesses, consumptions, withering, exile, poverty, imprisonment, mourning, fears, death (especially among those advanced in age); fearfully cold, freezing, misty, and pestilential weather, corruption of the air, clouds, and gloom; storms, the wreck of fleets, disastrous voyages, the high and ebb tides of the seas,⁵¹ floods and pollution of rivers, and the blight or destruction of crops.⁵² Key among these for our purposes are withering, exile, poverty, and the emphasis on those advanced in age. Astrologically speaking, this last quality relates to the longer period of Saturn's revolution—twenty-nine years—in comparison to the other planets.

While the list in *Quad.* 2.8 mainly concerns planetary influence on material conditions and temporal events, the step from these to more truly qualitative associations is a short one. In *Quad.* 3.13, *De qualitate anime*, Ptolemy treats the congenital effects of Saturn on the personality as they occur in favorable or unfavorable connection with the other planets.⁵³ Here we begin to see, in addition to the

⁵¹ Cf. the more general interpretation of this phrase afforded by the Latin: "In mari vero diminutiones et augmenta proprie contingent" (qtd. in Kay 352, n. 12).

⁵² Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1940), 35; 39; 179, 181. The *Tetrabiblos* will be cited in the text as *Quad.* followed by book and chapter number. For some reason Kay thinks Ptolemy omits any reference to Saturn's dryness—which is certainly found in *Quad.* 1.4—and then proceeds to make much of the qualification "sed accidentaliter humida" added to Saturn's definition as "natura frigida et sicca" (Klibansky 138; cf. Kay 219-22).

⁵³ I leave aside both the physical description of the Saturnine individual in 3.11 and the list of bodily organs assigned to the planet in 3.12, since they have no obvious relevance to the sphere of Saturn in *Paradiso*. That said, it is worth noting that Boccaccio describes Dante himself in terms nearly identical to those Ptolemy uses for persons born under Saturn when he is "in the orient" (309)—"His complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black, and curled, and his expression very melancholy and thoughtful" (Boccaccio, *Vita* 8, in James Robinson Smith, trans., *The Earliest*

malignant qualities associated with the planet *per se* and with his effects on weather and so on, the translation of some qualities into human terms that are not wholly unfavorable and that begin to prepare us to understand Dante's Saturnines. Naturally, the personal characteristics as Ptolemy originally gives them are intended to be either positive or negative according as the planets are favorable or unfavorable, but between Ptolemy's second-century Alexandria and the Latin Middle Ages—not to mention the interposition of Arabic—come various major shifts in semantic significance as well as mores. Astrologers that predate Dante, like Michael Scott and Guido Bonatti, or the Latin translations of Albumasar and Alcibitius, as well as later Dante's own commentators, give an anachronistic medieval coloring to Ptolemy's categories. For this reason I shall summarize, paraphrase, and give my own translations of the characteristics in order to convey the meaning as it would have appeared to a reader like Dante.⁵⁴

Thus, when Saturn rules the soul alone the effects are rigid and singular opinions, deep thought, austerity, a laborious, prescriptive, chastising, and circumspect demeanor, love of solitude or hermitages (φιλερήμους), and weeping.⁵⁵ In connection with Jupiter, Saturn promotes the development of honor to elders, watchfulness, good judgment, intelligence, and persistence in philosophy.⁵⁶ When allied with Mars, Saturn influences men to be greedy and given to taking money by unjust means, as well as murderers.⁵⁷ With Venus, Saturn causes men to spurn women, love the ancients, crave solitude and follow hermits (φιλερήμους), to be spare in conversation and eschew company, to purify themselves for divinity; he causes them to be mysterious, particular about rites, founders of sacred things, and self-controlled.⁵⁸ In connection with Mercury, Saturn makes human souls industrious, delighting in learning, interested in laws, mystics or secretive men (μυστικούς), partakers of hidden and ineffable things, content with few

Lives of Dante, Translated from the Italian of Giovanni Boccaccio and Lionardo Bruni Aretino [N.Y.: Holt, 1901], 42).

⁵⁴ The list that follows is based on Ptolemy, *Quad.* 3.13 (338-47). I will cite page numbers in the notes.

⁵⁵ Ptolemy 338-41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 340, 341.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 342, 343.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 344, 345.

material goods, bitter and diligent, watchful, and pursuant of wisdom.⁵⁹ Saturnine effects on mental activity are particularly significant for our purposes, but more temperamental qualities are also suggestive—the black color of the Saturnine humor, the inclination to labor and religious matters, the preference—from Saturn’s mitigation and in fact reversal of Venereal effects—for celibacy and solitude.⁶⁰ To medieval thinking, it is as though Ptolemy is describing Christian monastic hermits even without ever having seen one.⁶¹ Such equations come to Dante as the result of the translation and expansion of Ptolemy’s astrological qualities into the Latin of a Christian era that has been profoundly shaped by the monastic tradition.

The general association with solitude, religiosity, and a broadly speaking contemplative cast of mind should be clear. However, Klibansky *et alii* speak for most readers of these works who are primarily interested in Saturn when they admit that lists of astrological qualities as a whole lack much in coherence.⁶² Part of these authors’ response is to emphasize the ambiguity/ambivalence and double nature of Saturn.⁶³ When dealing with planetary qualities, however, it is well to remember that the method to the madness is not the sort that admits of a satisfactory or tidy conceptual explanation. Why do the planets cause these particular characteristics? Aside from the general recognition that coldness and dryness cause constriction and hence withdrawal broadly, ancient and medieval authors are inconsistent and characteristically terse in their explanations. In direct reference to Saturn, Georg Rabuse aptly describes the wealth of characteristics and correspondences Dante employs as the “Saturnine climate.” The phrase might be taken to refer to a kind of literal “climate” of the planetary sphere, but I would suggest that it

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 346, 347.

⁶⁰ The astrologer Guido Bonatti, whom Dante sees in *Inf.* 20.115-18, may be the first to equate the black hue of Saturn with the black hue of the (Benedictine) monastic habit (Kay 227).

⁶¹ Though for reasons of space I have only referred to the work of the single most important of the *auctores astrologici*, the same or similar characteristics can be found multiplied at great length in others Dante might have known like Alcabitius, Albumasar, and Abraham Ibn Ezra. See for instance the references to the Arabic astrologers in Klibansky 127-33.

⁶² Klibansky 132.

⁶³ For Klibansky *et alii* this largely stems from Saturn’s assimilation to the Greek Kronos, but this double nature characterizes the pre-Hellenistic Roman god as well. See Giuseppe Pucci, “Roman Saturn: The Shady Side,” in Massimo Ciavolella & Amilcare A. Iannucci, eds., *Saturn from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1992), 37-47, and H. S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 136-227.

denotes just as much an “atmosphere” in which the reader becomes enveloped.⁶⁴ The term works equally well for the student of Saturn lost in the dense array of lore and sources as it does for Dante’s literary effect. Lewis insightfully remarks that “the planetary characters need to be seized in an intuition rather than built up out of concepts.”⁶⁵ If we keep this in mind, we will be far less likely as readers to become lost in a dark and pathless wood.⁶⁶

Many of the associations of Saturn’s sphere and atmosphere, however, derive not from the natural sciences of astrology and medicine, but from myth. In the medieval conception of discourse about the heavens, astral myth teaches through fictions, but is still necessary for conveying the significance of the heavenly bodies.⁶⁷ Florence Russo sees in Dante’s Saturn “a *contaminatio* of sorts between the mythological, astrological and even iconographic attributes,”⁶⁸ well exemplified among later writers by

⁶⁴ Rabuse, “Saturne” 16.

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Discarded* 109. Michael Ward has persuasively demonstrated that Lewis himself made use of the intuitive nature of the planetary characters in a way analogous to Dante’s *Paradiso* in the seven “Chronicles of Narnia,” of which the final one, *The Last Battle*, corresponds to Saturn. See Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2008).

⁶⁶ Hugh of St. Victor advocates order and method in following a wide course of reading, so as not to wander “into the very thick of the forest [*silva*] and [lose] the path of the direct route” (*Didasc.* 5.5; 127). This *silva* is a common medieval metaphor for unstructured materials or unformed matter, one which bears comparison to Dante’s own loss of the “direct route [*la diritta via*]” in the *selva oscura* of *Inf.* 1.2-3 (Carruthers, *Book* 33, 204). Interestingly, in *Confessions* 11.2, St. Augustine—much like Robert Frost’s famous speaker—finds the *silva* of Scripture full of *opaca secreta*, a “lovely dark and deep” place to wander (*Confessions*, Vol. 2, trans. William Watts [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 2006], 212)!

⁶⁷ Honorius Augustodensis, *De philosophia mundi* 2.5 (PL 172.59B). Even such a thoroughly didactic poem as Marcus Manilius’s *Astronomica* draws its conceptions of the Saturnine partition of the sky from the myth of Saturn “cast down himself in ages past from empire in the skies and the throne of heaven” (*Astr.* 2.932-33; in Manilius, *Astronomica*, ed. & trans. G. P. Goold [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1997], 157). Cf. the whole passage:

at, qua subsidit converso cardine mundus
 fundamenta tenens, aversum et suspicit orbem
 ac media sub nocte iacet, Saturnus in illa
 parte suas agitat vires, deiectus et ipse
 imperio quondam mundi solioque deorum,
 et pater in patrios exercet numina casus
 fortunamque senum. | titulus, quem Graecia fecit,
 Daemonium signat dignas pro nomine vires. (*Astr.* 2.292-38; 156)

Though only the description beginning with *deiectus* is overtly qualitative, even when Manilius seems to be giving a merely physical description his diction points obliquely to the Saturnine qualities. Compare for instance his reference to Saturn “fundamenta tenens” (holding the foundations) with the *Aetna*’s description of Saturn as “stella tenax” (*Aetna* 2.242; Robinson Ellis, ed. & trans., *Aetna: A Critical Recension of the Text* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1901], 30, 31). The divine star *is* what it *does* and vice versa.

⁶⁸ Florence Russo, *Dante’s Search for the Golden Age* (Stony Brook, N.Y.: Forum Italicum, 2011), 57.

the Third Vatican Mythographer.⁶⁹ Indeed, whatever may be Dante's debt to astrology, it is with the mythographers and poets that we begin to uncover the truest sources of the *Commedia's* intertextuality.⁷⁰ And the most important such myth in reference to Saturn is undoubtedly that of the Golden Age.

According to that myth, broadly speaking, before Saturn's castration and exile by his son Jupiter he reigned over a period of human history characterized by peace and contentment associated with the absence of laws or their enforcement (because not needed), stability of place (without the greed of mercantilism), no privatization of property or fortification of common property, no war or weapons of war, no labor for food, and a paradisaical climate and its attendant flora. While this myth has its literary beginnings in Hesiod's eighth- to seventh-century BCE *Works and Days*, it was the Romans who made Kronos/Saturn more clearly responsible for the beneficial nature of that epoch.⁷¹ Thus Vergil alludes to the Golden Age in numerous places throughout all of his work, where it forms a notoriously complex, not to say self-contradictory, theme.⁷² Ovid refers to it in several passages of the *Fasti*, and most prominently in *Metamorphoses* 1.89-150.⁷³ Both poets treat the Golden Age not only as a primordial age of the earth, but as a period continued more or less in the local history of Italy after Saturn is overthrown and forced to

⁶⁹ See the passage on Saturn in Georgius Henricus Bode, ed., *Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum Latini Tres Romae Nuper Reperti*, Vol. 1: Mythographos Continens (Cellis: Schulze, 1834), 153-7.

⁷⁰ To apply Julia Kristeva's critical category to the *Commedia*, the poem is "a permutation of texts," within nearly any given passage of which, "several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (*Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, & Leon S. Roudiez [N.Y.: Columbia, 1980], 36). For helpful introductions to Dantean intertextuality, see Christopher Kleinhenz's broad perspective in "Perspectives on Intertextuality in Dante's *Divina Commedia*," *Romance Quarterly* 54.3 (2007), 183-94, and the more focused considerations in Kevin Brownlee on "Dante and the classical poets," and Peter S. Hawkins on "Dante and the Bible" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2006), 100-19 and 120-35.

⁷¹ Gianni Guastella, "Saturn, Lord of the Golden Age," Ciavolella & Iannucci 8.

⁷² See Vergil, *Eclogue* 4; *Georgics* 1.122-146, 2.172, 2.458-474, 2.535-538, 4.124-147; *Aeneid* 1.291-296, 6.791-794, 7.45-49, 7.203-204, and 8.315-327. On the subtlety and complexity of Vergil's use of the myth, see especially Christine Perkell, "The Golden Age and Its Contradictions in the Poetry of Vergil," *Vergilius* 48 (2002), 3-39; but also Patricia A. Johnston, "Vergil's Conception of Saturnus," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 10 (1977), 57-70, and Marianne Wifstrand Schiebe, "The Saturn of the *Aeneid*: Tradition or Innovation?" *Vergilius* 32 (1986), 43-60. For the Golden Age in Augustan literature generally, see Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton U, 1996), 90-106, and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology," *Past & Present* 95 (1982), 19-36.

⁷³ See Ovid, *Fasti* 1.193-200, 1.233-55, 4.195-20, 5.17-34, 6.29-32.

hide there.⁷⁴ As such, the happiness and prosperity of human beings in this second Golden Age typically involves beneficial law and salutary labor, both instituted by a Saturn actively concerned with the welfare of mortals. Finally, some Roman poets, and particularly Vergil in *Eclogue* 4 and *Aeneid* 6.791-94, treat the Golden Age prophetically, as something that can return in some form: “Now too returns the Virgin [i.e., Justice]; Saturn’s rule returns....”⁷⁵

The reference to the Virgin is the most celebrated instance of a piece of the myth that was first made explicit by the third-century BCE Greek poet, Aratus—the personification of the idyllic state of the Golden Age in the mythic figure of Justice or Astraea.⁷⁶ Thus Ovid concludes his account of the four ages by noting the original departure of Vergil’s Virgin from the world of man: “Piety lay vanquished, and the maiden Astraea, last of the immortals, abandoned the blood-soaked earth [to become the constellation Virgo].”⁷⁷ In this way, the myth associates Saturn and Justice with primitive beatitude, while at the same time casting history as a process of deterioration and ruin, which also becomes associated with Saturn.

The Golden Age is periodically celebrated at Saturnalia in the license of the enslaved and the social

⁷⁴ On Saturn’s flight to Latium see Ennius, *Remains of Old Latin I*, ed. & trans. E.H. Warmington (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1988), 422, 423; in Vergil, see *Georg.* 2.172 and *Aeneid* 7.203-204 and 8.315-327; in Ovid see *Fasti* 1.233-255 and 6.29-32. On the localization of the Golden Age myth in Latium, see M. Ch. Guittard, “*Saturnia terra: Mythe et Réalité*,” *Colloquie histoire et historiographie: Clío (8-9 décembre 1978, Paris E.N.S.)* 15 (1980), 177-86.

In *Inf.* 14.95-96 Dante names the original earthly realm of Saturn as Crete, an idea the mythographers seem to have deduced from Jupiter’s childhood there. See Giorgio Padoan, “Saturno,” *Enciclopedia Dantesca, Vol. 5* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1973), 41. Cf. the Third Vatican Mythographer 1.2 in Georgius Henricus Bode, ed., *Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum Latini Tres Romae Nuper Reperti, Vol. 1: Mythographos Continens* (Cellis: Schulze, 1834), 153. Thus Francesco da Buti (1324-1406), for instance, reconciles the traditions when he says that Saturn was the “king of Crete who, driven out of the kingdom by his son Jupiter, came to Italy in that part called Lazio” (com. *Par.* 21.13, *Dartmouth*).

⁷⁵ Vergil, *Eclogue* 4.8; in Vergil, *The Eclogues*, trans. Guy Lee (London: Penguin, 1988), 57. In *Pur.* 22.67-73, Statius credits the prophecy in *Ecl.* 4 with his conversion to Christianity, the culmination of a long tradition of Christian readings of Vergil’s poem. For a general survey of the subject, see Pierre Courcelle, “Les Exégèses chrétiennes de la quatrième Eglogue,” *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 59 (1957), 294-319. See also the remarks in T.S. Eliot, “Virgil and the Christian World,” 1951, in *On Poetry and Poets* (N.Y.: Farrar, 2009), 135-38; Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, 1975 (London: ARK, 1985), 33-37; and Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (N.Y.: Viking, 1975), 24-25.

⁷⁶ Contemporaneously with Dante, Jean de Meun wrote: “*Joustice qui jadis regnot / Au tans que saturnus regne ot*” (*La Roman de la Rose* 5531-2). See Singleton’s chapter on Dante’s use of this theme in *Purgatorio* in *Journey to Beatrice* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1958), 184-203.

⁷⁷ Ovid, *Met.* 1.149-50. Cf. the Latin: “*victa iacet pietas, et virgo caede madentis / ultima caelestum terras Astraea reliquit*” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Vol. 1: Books I-VIII*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1994], 12, 13. See the account of Virgo’s catasterism, the longest of the astral myths in ll. 96-136 of Aratus, “*Phaenomena*,” in Robert Hard, trans., *Constellation Myths* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2015), 141-2.

leveling by fortune in the playing of dice.⁷⁸ The Late Antique Christian philosopher Boethius longs for the ultimate return of the Golden Age in *De consolazione* 2.5.⁷⁹ In the meantime, however, between the ancient and prophesied reigns of Saturn lies the melancholy survey of the subsequent periods of decline. Even when Vergil's *Ecl.* 4 is understood as fulfilled in Christ, there is the golden age of Christianity in the primitive Church, the golden age of monasticism before the devastation of Scetis in Egypt, and the golden age of the individual religious orders of the West testified to in *Paradiso* by Saints Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Peter Damian, and Benedict.

In any case, while the Golden Age of Saturn's rule had its obvious appeal, the divine figure himself remained consistently ambivalent, if not quite dark, in astrological lore and in cosmogonic myth. The Neoplatonists, and particularly the mythographers of that tradition, may justly claim responsibility for suggesting the first positive associations with the planet considered *in se*.⁸⁰ For the philosophers, the Neoplatonic conviction that no heavenly body could have an essentially evil influence coupled with their hierarchical image of the cosmos perhaps provided the impetus for this new understanding. In other words, being physically "highest" of the planets may also have meant to them that Saturn is "higher" in relation to the One, and in fact the virtue of having his seat in the highest heaven might have formed the first link between Saturn the planet with Saturn the forefather of the gods.⁸¹ Furthermore, for the

⁷⁸ On the temporary freedom of the enslaved during Saturnalia, see Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.7.25, in Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, trans. Percival Vaughan Davies (N.Y.: Columbia, 1969), 59. On the significance of games of chance at Saturnalia, see Maurizio Bettini, "*Tacta alea est: Saturn and the Saturnalia*," Ciavolella & Iannucci 27-30.

⁷⁹ How happy was that earlier age

When men content depended on the trusty land,

And not yet sunk in idle luxury

Sated their hunger only at their need

With acorns gathered with ease. (Boethius 207)

⁸⁰ "Fu il neoplatonismo che nell'ambito della concezione panteistica riuscì a convertire in positive l'influenza del glaciale pianeta, attribuendogli la fredda potenza della razionalità, la forza del pensiero puro; e poichè Saturno ruota nel cielo più alto, fu identificato con il Nous, l'Intelletto divino" (Edy Minguzzi, *L'enigma forte: Il codice occulto della Divina Commedia* [Genoa: ECIG, 1988], 219-20).

⁸¹ Klibansky 152. It may well be wondered too whether the pensive qualities in the human temperament resulting from the influence of Ptolemy's Saturn might have been transferred at some point to the planet itself.

Neoplatonists a return to Plato's interpretation of Kronos as "intellect or understanding" (*Cratylus* 396b) imparted even to the once cruel and castrated figure a metaphysical significance thitherto unknown.⁸²

The Neoplatonist hierarchy of One, Mind, and Soul with their subsequent emanations is also crucial to these associations of the planet. Thus, in his highly influential commentary on Cicero's *De Somnium Scipionis*,⁸³ the Late Antique Roman author Macrobius (c. 400) established a link between the hierarchy of the macrocosm and that of the human microcosm that contributed decisively to Saturn's rehabilitation.

By the impulse of the first weight the soul, having started on its downward course from the intersection of the zodiac and the Milky Way to the successive spheres lying beneath, as it passes through these spheres, not only takes on the aforementioned envelopment in each sphere by approaching a luminous body, but also acquires each of the attributes which it will exercise later. In the sphere of Saturn it obtains reason and understanding [in Saturni, ratiocinationem et intellegentiam], called *logistikon* and *theoretikon*....⁸⁴

⁸² Klibansky 153-4. The double rendering of Plato's term *nous* is that of C.D.C. Reeves, in Plato, *The Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, associate ed. D.S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 114.

⁸³ The work usually entitled *De Somnium Scipionis* is the only portion of Cicero's great *Republic* that has survived intact. For an English translation see Cicero, "The Dream of Scipio," *On the Good Life*, trans. Michael Grant (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1971), 341-55. For a Latin text see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations, I and Scipio's Dream*, ed. Frank Ernest Rockwood (Norman, O.K.: U of Oklahoma, 1970). On the general influence of *De Somnium* on medieval thought, see Lewis, *Discarded* 23-8.

⁸⁴ Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis* 1.12.13-14; in Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (N.Y.: Columbia, 1966), 136; Latin text in Ludovicus Ianus, ed., *Commentarii in Ciceronis Somnium Scipionis* (Quedlinburg: Godofredus Bassius, 1848), 74. It should be noted that Macrobius at least specifically denies any connection between the nature of the planets and their divine names (*In Somn.* 1.19.18; 166). Presumably then for him the connection between reason/understanding and Saturn is based on the latter's height corresponding to the highest human faculties.

Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez note: "there is a strong connection between the *Commedia* and the entire passage in Macrobius, not only because it is from Gemini that Dante leaves the visible universe in *Paradiso* 27, but also because in his journey heavenward Dante roughly retraces the path Macrobius implies for the soul's return to the stars with the curious coincidence of the penultimate step via Leo, beneath which Dante visits Saturn: contiguous to Leo is the constellation Crater, the soul's first downward step according to Macrobius: see *In Somn.* 1.12.8" (Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's Rime Petrose* [Berkeley: U of California, 1990], 363, n. 60).

This doctrine of the soul's prenatal descent as an "order of...steps" down through the planetary spheres to "the infernal regions of this life" superimposes the gradational hierarchy of divine emanations onto the human faculties via the planets.⁸⁵ With the possible exception of Mercury,⁸⁶ the descending order of the planets thus corresponds to an order of human faculties that in Neoplatonic philosophy also constitutes a descending series.⁸⁷ The association of the planet with reasoning and intelligence decisively connects him with the highest faculties of the soul, and therefore with the psychic locus of contemplation itself—the nineteenth-century commentator Niccolò Tommaseo (1837) paraphrases Macrobius, "From this planet,...contemplative virtue descends."⁸⁸ The North African mythographer Fulgentius (468-533) draws a similar connection, citing the novel etymology that *Saturnus* derives from *sacrum nun*, from the Greek word νοῦς, or "mind," or from *satorem nun*, "as for the divine intelligence as it creates all things."⁸⁹ Neoplatonic metaphysics has carried us far indeed from the pathetic figure of Hesiod, but it finds itself in

⁸⁵ Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.12.1 (133). Macrobius's reference to the hierarchy of divine emanations in the next chapter of the *Commentary* is a key statement of the doctrine of the "Great Chain of Being" that may well have been an important inspiration for Dante. Macrobius refers to Mind as a light illuminating the entire universe via the mirrors of beings reflecting it as it descends below (*In Somn.* 1.14.15; 145). Cf. especially the cosmic model of divine influence in *Par.* 2.112-38, but also the role of mirrors in the gradual order of emanation in *Par.* 13.56-63, and 29.130-45. On the general influence of Macrobius's *Commentary*, see Lewis, *Discarded* 60-9. On the importance of the quoted passage from Macrobius, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (N.Y.: Harper, 1965), 63. Though he has a poor grasp of Dionysian theology and therefore sees Dante as flirting with heresy here, see also the remarks on Dante in Lovejoy 68-70.

⁸⁶ One might think the ability to speak and interpret would be closer in nature to the *logistikon* than to the *phytikon*.

⁸⁷ While he refers to a similar schema in both *De temporibus* and the later *De temporum ratione*, the Venerable Bede greatly diminishes the hierarchical order of human faculties in relation to the planets by deriving his schema from St. Isidore of Seville's *De rerum naturae* 3.4. Thus, to Mercury belongs not only language but also wisdom or intelligence, while Saturn's contribution is merely slowness or sluggishness (*tarditas*). See Bede, *On the Nature of Things and On Times*, trans. Calvin B. Kendall & Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool U, 2010), 108; Bede, *Reckoning*, 33. Dante clearly owes the greater debt to Macrobius on this point.

⁸⁸ Niccolò Tommaseo, comm. *Par.* 21.13, *Dartmouth*.

⁸⁹ *Fulgentius the Mythographer, Translated from the Latin, with Introduction*, trans. L. Whitbread (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1971), 49. Of course, the translation of the Greek *nous* as English "sense" can be extraordinarily misleading—much better is C. D. C. Reeve's glossed rendering of *Cratylus* 396b "intellect or understanding," or "the pure and unadulterated mind itself" in Klibansky (Plato 114; Klibansky 154).

Regarding ancient and medieval etymologizing, we must recall that it does not pretend to scientific philological accuracy. Mary Carruthers demonstrates that for ancients and medieval, etymology is primarily a mnemonic device used for rhetorical creativity and invention. See Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2008), 155-60; see also Francis Cairns, "Ancient 'Etymology' and Tibullus: On the Classification of 'Etymologies' and on 'Etymological Markers,'" *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 42 (1996), 24-59. Standard works of such etymologizing, like Varro's *De lingua Latina* and St. Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, formed an important part of the grammatical and rhetorical training of a medieval education. See Paul Abelson, *The Seven Liberal Arts: A Study in Medieval Culture* (N.Y.: Columbia U, 1906), 20.

the congenial company of Saturn's astrological connections with deep thought on the one hand, and his mythical wise rule in the Golden Age(s) on the other.⁹⁰

In their monumental *Saturn and Melancholy*, Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl demonstrate how this metaphysical, contemplative Saturn became further enriched in the Christian tradition by connection with the doctrine of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit of Isaiah 11:2-3.⁹¹ Thus, the influential Church Father Ambrose of Milan (340-397 CE) identifies the series of gifts with the series of seven planets.⁹² Though he does not make the planetary connection, Augustine in his turn certainly does make the gifts an ascending series of "steps" like the planets, the highest step being the gift of wisdom.⁹³ Thus, the astrological association of Saturn with wisdom is reinforced by the correspondence of the planets with the famous passage in Isaiah. In the thirteenth century these associations are taken up by other authors who introduce the mechanism of stellar influence into the Saturn/wisdom identification and make the seventh planet a guide of the soul's intellective power to prudence and even prophecy.⁹⁴ This ultimately results in a dialectic between Saturnine contemplation of the highest things, what Macrobius calls "divine matters," and the Saturnine activity of judging right behavior and providing laws for others (an effect of Saturn's "familiarity" with Mercury), or what Macrobius calls the exercise of "political virtues."⁹⁵

Dante himself presents two final aspects of the background to Saturn's sphere in the *Convivio*, one of which corresponds with Saturnine contemplation and the other with Saturn's active role as judge

⁹⁰ Though it would not have been known to Dante, Proclus (412-485) concludes his commentary on *Cratylus* 396b: "For the King Cronus is Intellect and institutor of all intellectual life, but Intellect which transcends any relation to perceptible things and is immaterial and separate" (Proclus, *On Plato Cratylus*, trans. Brian Duvick [London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014], 60). Saturn thus becomes a purely contemplative figure.

⁹¹ Klibansky 165-68.

⁹² Klibansky 165.

⁹³ Augustine, *De Sermonibus Domini* 1.4 (*PL* 34.1234). Despite the use of the term "ladder" for Augustine's version of this doctrine in Klibansky *et alii*, as far as I can tell the Bishop of Hippo does not actually refer to the gifts explicitly as *scala* (cf. Klibansky 165). However, an engraving in Antonio Bettini's 1477 *Monte Sancto di Dio* (British Museum, 845,0825.463) attributed to Baccio Baldini visually depicts the seven gifts of the Spirit as a ladder, with wisdom as the topmost rung.

⁹⁴ Klibansky 165-6, 169-70.

⁹⁵ Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.8.12 and 1.8.5-8 respectively.

and lawgiver. First, drawing on a tradition that goes back at least to the Carolingians, the poet notes parallels between the seven heavenly spheres and the seven liberal arts of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*.⁹⁶ In this comparison, Saturn becomes matched with astronomy/astrology (“*all’Astrologia*”) for two reasons: the great length of the planet’s motion through the zodiac parallels the great length of time it takes to master the discipline of astronomy, and just as the planet is the highest of the seven, so is astronomy the “highest,” that is the noblest, of the series of seven liberal arts (*Conv.* 2.13.28-30).⁹⁷ While the *Convivio* passage establishes only two of the most basic correspondences between the seventh planet and the seventh liberal art, slowness and height, Ciro Perna notes that these “are entirely consonant with contemplation, the highest of human predispositions, the achievement of which requires time and dedication.”⁹⁸ We may also be reminded of Varro’s etymology associating the root of *contemplārī* with the practice of astrological divination, where the *templa caelitem* are equated with the stars.⁹⁹

Furthermore, the connection once established opens the door for many other materials for the poet to work with. For instance, various medieval authorities ascribe significance to the etymology of *astronomia* so that she actually “teaches the law of the stars.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, in *Aen.* 8.319-22, Vergil says

⁹⁶ Gustavo Costa, “Dialectic and Mercury (Education, Magic and Religion in Dante),” *The Divine Comedy and the Encyclopedia of Arts and Sciences: Acta of the International Dante Symposium, 13-16 Nov. 1983, Hunter College, New York*, ed. Giuseppe C. Di Scipio & Aldo Scaglione (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988), 44, 46. Martianus Cappella enumerated the liberal arts as seven, Boethius coined the term “quadrivium” for the four mathematical arts of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, and the Carolingians designated grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric as the “trivium” by analogy.

⁹⁷ Dante, *Conv.* 2.13.28-30 (112, 113). Walter Benjamin observes a direct link between this great height and contemplation itself in a quote from Johann Carl Friedrich Giehlow: “as the planet highest in the sky and most distant from daily life, and as the originator of every deep contemplation, calls the soul from outward affairs into the interior, makes it to rise ever higher, and finally grants it the utmost in knowledge and prophetic gifts” (*Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 2019], 152).

⁹⁸ Ciro Perna, “La mente, che qui luce, in terra fumma”: il canto XXI del *Paradiso*,” *Rivista di studi danteschi* (Rome: Salerno, 2020), 99.

⁹⁹ Varro, *De lingua Latina* 7.2.6-9; in Varro, *On the Latin Language, Vol. 1: Books V-VII*, trans. Roland G. Kent (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1999), 272-77. Cf. Georges Güntert, “Canto XXI,” *Lectura Dantis Turicensis, Vol. III: Paradiso*, ed. Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002), 325; Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Canti XXI-XXII: Contemplazione e Poesia,” *Esperimenti danteschi: Paradiso 2010*, ed. Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), 204.

¹⁰⁰ Cassiodorus Senator (c. 485-c. 585), *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum* 2.7.1 (*An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings*, trans. Leslie Webber Jones [N.Y.: Norton, 1969], 199); St. Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), *Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX* 3.24 (*Etymologies, Vol. I*, trans. Priscipilla Throop [Charlotte, V.T.: MedievalMS, 2005], 104; Alanus, *Anticlaudianus, or The Good and Perfect Man*, trans. James J. Sheridan [Toronto: PIMS, 1973], 117.

that Saturn “came from heaven” and “gave laws” to men, and we see here a resonant connection between the laws that establish the order of the heavens, those which establish order among men, and those which establish order between the parts of the soul in the human microcosm. Finally, St. Jerome (an archetypal hermit to the Middle Ages) had emphasized the connection between the length of study and another Saturnine quality, old age: “The old age of those who have formed their youth upon creditable pursuits becomes wiser with the years, acquires...greater wisdom with the passage of time, and reaps the sweetest fruits of former studies....with the aged, the thunder of divine discourse tarries beyond human speech.”¹⁰¹ As always, each association of Saturn opens up other associations upon which Dante will draw for his imagery.

The traditional personifications of Astronomy likewise furnish Dante with a host of relevant images and materials. The Late Antique philosopher, Martianus Capella, in his *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, depicts the learned virgin¹⁰² Astronomy as a regal keeper of secrets “which over the vast span of ages have been reposit[ed] [*clausa*] in the sanctums of Egyptian priests.”¹⁰³ The third of the three goddesses to whom Martianus compares Astronomy, “Libyan Urania,” the muse of Astronomy, holds as her attribute a mirror given by Wisdom for the purpose of contemplation.¹⁰⁴ Of course, when the Muses and planets are paired, the authors do not connect Urania with Saturn. Martianus explicitly links Urania “to the outermost sphere of the starry universe,” that is, with the heaven of the fixed stars, while he tells

¹⁰¹ Qtd. in Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.* 3.14 (98, 99).

¹⁰² In his own description Alanus Insulis stresses the connection of Astronomy with the intellect—she “has a first-rate mind within her breast” and has “no dependence on another intellect,” and “Her gaze is fixed on the stars, her eyes leading the way for the mind, track down the secrets of the heavens” (*Anticlaudianus* 117).

¹⁰³ Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis* 8.812; in *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, Vol. II: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, trans. William Harris Stahl & Richard Johnson with E. L. Burge (N.Y.: Columbia, 1977), 318. Cf. Albumasar in John of Seville’s translation: “Et significat prolixitatem cogitationis et paucitatem locutionis et scientiam secretorum...[emphasis mine]” (*Libri introductorii maioris ad scientiam judiciorum astrorum*, Vol. 5, Tome 2, 2nd part, trans. John of Seville, rev. Gérard de Crémone, ed. Richard Lemay [Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1995], 312).

¹⁰⁴ Martianus, *De nuptiis* 1.7 (7), 8.810 (317). Significantly, the first of the three goddesses to whom Martianus compares Astronomy is Astraea, that is, either Virgo herself or her mother, who “was called Justice” according to Hyginus, and who dwelt on earth during Saturn’s reign (Martianus 317; Eratosthenes & Hyginus, *Constellation Myths with Aratus’s Phaenomena*, trans. Robin Hard [Oxford: Oxford U, 2015], 73).

us that “Polymnia took over the sphere of Saturn.”¹⁰⁵ We can see a kind of slippage of correspondence here. Dante pairs Saturn with the liberal art of Astrology/Astronomy, but the subject of that art includes as well the sphere above Saturn—that of the fixed stars—and the muse of Astronomy is paired with them in Martianus.¹⁰⁶ At this point we may recall one of Saturn’s fundamental dualities. He fixes his gaze like Astronomy on the stars themselves; he is turned, as Paulinus of Nola wrote of the contemplative hermits, “to the very deep of truth.”¹⁰⁷ But when he subsequently turns toward the lower spheres and ultimately towards earth, Saturn’s own great height affords him a comprehensive view of all that lies beneath, a view understood all the more for having glimpsed the vision above. Saturn’s sphere comprehends and includes all the lower heavens, and finally even the earth itself.

The second aspect of the background to Saturn’s sphere in the *Convivio* appears more obliquely. In the vision of Dionysius the Areopagite, the exemplars of contemplative activity are the ninefold celestial hierarchy of angelic beings, who “think the thoughts of the divine realm intelligently, immaterially, and in a single act.”¹⁰⁸ Dante, however, does not simply identify the contemplative life with the angels in a generic way. In an apparently original identification, he notes in *Conv.* 2.5.13, “The moving heavens, which are nine, tell of the numbers, the orders, and the hierarchies [of angels], and the tenth proclaims the unity and stillness of God.”¹⁰⁹ With this equation, Dante establishes the correspondence of each angelic rank (with all of its unique medieval significance) with each one of the heavenly spheres. Marc Cogan argues on the basis of the angels’ inspiration of the “motion and virtue of

¹⁰⁵ Martianus, *De nuptiis* 1.27, 28 (16).

¹⁰⁶ Of course, it will be noticed that this inconsistency also stems in part from the discrepancy in number between planets and Muses. Also, I have specified Dante’s pairing of Saturn with Astronomy because in Martianus the seventh liberal art is not Astronomy but Harmony, or music.

¹⁰⁷ Paulinus of Nola, “Ad Ausonum,” *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*, trans. Helen Waddell (N.Y.: Holt, 1948), 34.

¹⁰⁸ Dionysius *Divine Names* 7.2 (106). On the nine ranks of angels, see above, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Dante, *Conv.* 77; “Li numeri, li ordini, le gerarchie narrano li cielil mobile, che sono nove, e lo decimo annunzia essa unitade e stabilitade di Dio” (*Conv.* 76). On early Christian connections between the angels and the stars, see Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church*, trans. David Heimann (Dublin: Four Courts, 1988), 18-19. This alignment of the nine orders with the nine spheres originates to all appearances with Dante himself. See Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning* (Notre Dame, I.N.: U of Notre Dame, 1999), 176, 356 n. 37.

the holy spheres” in *Par.* 2.127-29¹¹⁰ that the pairing of orders and spheres thus grants the respective angelic natures an incalculable importance in determining the nature of the planets themselves, one which transcends the merely traditional lore of astrology.¹¹¹

In the *Convivio*, however, Dante names the highest rank of the lower triad as the Thrones, whereas in the *Commedia* he follows Dionysius more closely and makes the Thrones the rank that “terminated the first triad” (*Par.* 28.105).¹¹² Thus, in *Paradiso* the order of Thrones directly corresponds to the sphere of Saturn; indeed, they are that sphere’s “blessed movers” and the immediate source of its distinguishing characteristics.¹¹³ Furthermore, Dante also refers in *Conv.* 2.5.12 to the tradition that the souls of the blessed go to replace those angels of each rank that fell with Lucifer, so that in Edmund Gardner’s words the saints “resemble” the angelic spirits of their respective heavens “in the special virtues they exhibit, and so co-operate with them in the government of the Universe.”¹¹⁴ The spheres are moved by angelic orders with unique characteristics, and the latter not only add to the storehouse of imagery contributing to the climate of a sphere, but specifically to the human souls associated with that sphere.

¹¹⁰ “Lo moto e la virtù d’I santi giri, . . . da’ beati motor convien che spiri” (*Par.* 2.127, 129; 22).

¹¹¹ Cogan 176-77, 190.

¹¹² “per che ’l primo ternaro terminonno” (*Par.* 28.105; 318). St. Gregory the Great’s smile at his mistake at having departed from Dionysius’s order is a moment of gentle humor in *Par.* 28.133-35. But as Cogan notes, the seemingly minor point has great significance for Dante himself (177-78, 360 n. 47).

¹¹³ John Carroll, *In Patria: An Exposition of Dante’s Paradiso* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1911), 24.

¹¹⁴ Edmund Gardner, *Dante’s Ten Heavens: A Study of the Paradiso* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1900), 21. Cf. *Conv.* 2.5.12: “And one thing cannot go unmentioned here. I say that of all these orders, hardly had they been created when a certain number, perhaps a tenth, was lost: to replenish which human nature was then created [E non è qui da tacere una parola. Dico che di tutti questi ordini si perdonono alquanto tosto che furono creati, forse in numero della decima parte: alla quale restaurare fue l’umana natura poi create]” (*Conv.* 76, 77). See also Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?* 16: “Deum constat proposuisse ut de humana natura, quam fecit sine peccato, numerum angelorum qui ceciderant, restitueret” (PL 158.381B). The assimilation of the blessed generally to the angelic life can be traced back to the New Testament: “For in the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage but *shall be* as the angels of God in heaven [In resurrectione enim neque unbenent neque nubentur sed sunt sicut angeli Dei in caelo]” (Mt. 22:30). See Daniélou 88-89. Peter Damian among many others calls the eremitical life in particular *vita angelica* (PL 145.250D).

In this way, the traditional descriptions of the rank of angels in a given order become quite enlightening, and it is here that the Saturnine activity of judgement comes into play.¹¹⁵ Dionysius emphasizes the significance of the name “throne”—a raised seat—as suggesting the particular angelic rank being lifted up above “passion and material concern” in “their upward-bearing toward the ultimate heights.”¹¹⁶ With the rest of the first triad, the Thrones are “contemplative” in that “they are filled with...contemplation of the one who is the cause and the source of all beauty” (*CH* 7.2).¹¹⁷ But on the other hand the great Cistercian elder of *Par.* 31.56-33.45, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), writes in a more explicit way about the nature of a throne as a place to *sit* in peace and tranquillity: the Thrones are themselves seated and God sits on them (*De consideratione* 4.8).¹¹⁸ Bernard further makes it clear that this tranquil sitting is not mere inactivity, but rather the prerequisite for right judgment (*De consid.* 4.10).¹¹⁹ In other words, even angelic beings can be seen to exercise Macrobius’s “political virtues” (*Comm.* 1.8.5-8). Aquinas’s predecessor in commenting on Dionysius’s angelic ranks, the Carolingian theologian and Greek scholar John Scotus Eriugena (c.800-c.877) connected sitting with the monastic values of exaltation by humility and the obedience of servanthood in his commentary on Dionysius’s hierarchy.¹²⁰ While all angelic beings are ultimately contemplative, these associations of the Saturnine order, the Thrones, with being lifted up to great heights, with tranquility, with active judgment, and with

¹¹⁵ Cogan draws ultimately upon the traditions relating the angelic ranks to the Persons of the Trinity in his analysis of the *Paradiso* (181-86). While I see much that is suggestive down that road and shall return to it later to some extent, in the present context I find it simpler to confine my remarks to the characteristics of the angelic order *per se*.

¹¹⁶ Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.1 (162). See Aquinas’s parsing of this passage as well as his distinction between thrones and the other ranks of the highest triad in *ST I*, q. 108, a. 5, ad. 6.

¹¹⁷ Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.2 (163).

¹¹⁸ Bernard, *De consideratione* 4.8; in Bernard, “On Consideration,” *Selected Works*, trans. G.R. Evans (N.Y.: Paulist, 1987), 154. “[Q]ui ex eo quod sedent, Throni dicuntur; et ex eo sedent, quod sedit in eis Deus....Quaeris quid illam sentiam sessionem? Summam tranquillitatem, placidissimam serenitatem, pacem quae exsuperat omnem intellectum” (*PL* 182.792C-793A).

¹¹⁹ Bernard, *De consid.* 4.10 (155). Cf. the Chartrian theologian Alanus Insulis (c.1128-1202/03), “Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of St. Dionysius, Chapter VII,” in Steven Chase, trans., *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels* (N.Y.: Paulist, 2002), 212; cf. Alanus, *Textes* 231-32.

¹²⁰ John Scotus Eriugena, “Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of Saint Dionysius, Chapter VII,” Chase 176; *PL* 122.177D-178A. The Carolingian theologian John Scotus Eriugena is not to be confused with the Scholastic philosopher, Duns Scotus (c. 1265/66-1308), who was Dante’s contemporary.

humility and obedience have particular relevance to the contemplative monastics of *Par.* 21-22 in their role as monastic founders and authors of rules.¹²¹

We may appear to have wandered rather far from consideration of the character of Saturn in medieval astrology, but it is crucial that we recognize how deceiving that appearance is. If we are to follow Dante, we must bear firmly in mind the associations between the seventh planet, the angelic order of Thrones, the liberal art of astrology/astronomy, the mind as contemplative faculty, the peace, justice, and simple life of the Golden Age, and the disposition toward solitude, as well as the rest of the associations we have surveyed, all of which may be designated as “Saturnine.” One way of conceiving of this is to think of the traditional myths and associations as constituting a “portrait” of Saturn, and to begin to look for traits in *Paradiso* 21-22 that will resemble those of the original portrait. Or, to return to Rabuse’s metaphor, recalling the signs of the medieval Saturn built up from all of these associations will enable us as readers to enter into the Saturnine atmosphere in *Par.* 21-22 along with Dante the pilgrim. In doing so, we may hope to follow Lewis’s suggestion and seize the character of Saturn in an intuition as we discuss his mostly oblique and tacit role in the cantos.

¹²¹ It should be noted, however, that Dante is inconsistent on this point about the contemplative nature of all angelic beings. In *Par.* 29.44-45 he implies that the “perfection” of the celestial movers lies in their motive activity (rather than in contemplation). In *Conv.* 2.4.10, on the other hand, Dante argues that it would be irrational for us to see the angels as possessing only the active blessedness and not the contemplative, “which is more excellent and divine” (71). This latter position is more in line with Dionysius himself as well as with the rest of the Christian tradition that followed him. In *ST I*, q. 112, a. 1, obj. 3, Aquinas states expressly, “But their [the angels’] entire beatitude consists in the contemplation of God” (my translation). Dante tries to have it both ways by insisting in *Conv.* 2.4.13 that “from the act of contemplation of some of” the angels “derives the circular movement of the heaven that governs the universe” (73). On this whole problem see Bemrose 77-89.

3.

“We have risen to the seventh splendor”

Dante’s Saturn

By the time the reader arrives at *Par.* 21 and Dante the pilgrim arrives at the sphere of Saturn, the presence of one Saturnine quality in particular can already be anticipated. Merely on the basis of the nature of souls encountered in the different spheres, the well-known list of cardinal virtues has emerged, with the Sun representing prudence, Mars representing fortitude, and Jupiter representing justice.¹²² Saturn therefore must be equated with temperance, which Aquinas defines as “every virtue that curbs and represses [cohibet...et deprimit] the passions.”¹²³ The fourth cardinal virtue overlaps neatly with the restrictive and confining qualities that derive ultimately from Saturn’s confinement by Jupiter to Tartarus. Indeed, Ptolemy notes that when Saturn allies with Venus he makes men “self-controlled.”¹²⁴ The poet confirms this connection already in *Par.* 21.10 by Beatrice’s reference to her beauty being “tempered

¹²² George Corbett, “Moral Structure,” *The Cambridge Companion to Dante’s Commedia*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski & Simon Gilson (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2019), 75. For a brief overview of the cardinal virtues see John Langan, “Cardinal Virtues,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress & John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 76-77. For a more in-depth scholastic overview of temperance in particular, see P. Lafêteur, “Temperance,” *The Virtues and States of Life*, ed. A.M. Henry, trans. Robert J. Olsen & Genevieve T. Lennon under the direction of Luis J. Putz (Chicago: Fides, 1957), 536-613. To take just a few references to the cardinal virtues in Latin authors that may have informed Dante, see Cicero, *De inventione* 2.53-4 (Cicero, *De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, trans. H.M. Hubbell [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard U, 1960], 326-33), Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.8.3-13, St. Gregory, *Mor.* 2.49.76-77, and Aquinas *ST I-II*, q. 61. As found in *Paradiso*, the cardinal virtues are of course those that Aquinas describes as “infused” rather than “acquired” (*ST I-II*, q. 65, a. 2, resp.). Singleton lays great stress on this distinction in his discussions of the four virtues in *Purgatorio* (*Pur.* II, 29.131, 723, and *Journey to Beatrice* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977], 161-2).

As the equivalent of *prudencia* is sometimes given as “wisdom,” it is worth noting that two different qualities sometimes go under that English term, both of which occur in Prov. 1:2-3: *sapientia* and *prudencia*. The seventh gift of the Holy Spirit in Is. 11:2 is *sapientia*, about which Aquinas concurs with Aristotle that “it belongs to wisdom to consider the highest cause” (*ST II-II*, q. 45, a. 1, resp.). The first cardinal virtue however is *prudencia*, and commenting on Prov. 10:23, “sapientia autem est viro prudentia,” Aquinas states, “Wherefore it is clear that prudence is wisdom about human affairs: but not wisdom absolutely, because it is not about the absolutely highest cause, for it is about human good, and this is not the best thing of all” (*ST II-II*, q. 47, a. 2, ad.1). The distinction then closely parallels the Saturnine dialectic of contemplation and action.

¹²³ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 61, a. 3, resp. (278).

¹²⁴ Ptolemy, *Quad.* 3.13 (345).

[temperasse],” along with the description of Saturn’s astrological temperance by Leo in *Par.* 21.14-15.¹²⁵ There are as well a number of references to curbing and restraint throughout Cantos 21 and 22, including Dante’s self-description as “one who within himself represses [repreme] the prick of his desire” (*Par.* 22.25-6).¹²⁶

Thus from the beginning of the twenty-first canto, Dante the poet by slow degrees prepares what Georg Rabuse calls the “Saturnine climate,” the sense of constriction/restriction and spiritual gravity, along with all the other associations we have surveyed in Cantos 21 and 22.¹²⁷ The opening lines of Canto 21 introduce the literal meaning of contemplation as vision restricted to a single object: “my eyes were fixed...and with them my mind, and from every other intent it was withdrawn” (*Par.* 21.1-3).¹²⁸ This fixity of gaze contextualizes the pilgrim’s realization that, in contrast to the previous spheres, in Saturn Beatrice does not smile (a detail expressed in terms of the withholding of light in ll. 10-11, meaning that Saturn is fittingly gloomier). She explains the restriction of the light of her smile by intertextual reference to Semele’s destruction in Ovid, *Met.* 3.271, which occurred through the crooked *counsel* of Juno as “*Saturnia*” (*Par.* 21.5-6, 61-3).¹²⁹ Paradoxically, Beatrice’s decision to restrict her smile, which may appear as a *withdrawal* from the pilgrim, is actually a condescension *toward* him.¹³⁰ Her gravity to the pilgrim who is uninstructed in the way of the highest contemplation demonstrates the concern of Saturn the law-giver (a recurrent theme in *Par.* 21-22) for what Vergil calls the *genus indocile*, the “race of

¹²⁵ “che sotto ’l petto del Leone ardente / raggia mo misto giù del suo valore” (*Par.* 21.14-5).

¹²⁶ Cf. Aquinas on temperance, which *deprimit* the passions (*ST* I-II, q. 61, a. 3, resp.).

¹²⁷ Jeremy Tambling writes, “The solemnity of monastic contemplation, which is the subject of these cantos, gives to them an austerity of emotion and leanness...” (“Getting Above the Thunder: Dante in the Sphere of Saturn,” *The Modern Language Review* 90.3 [1995], 632). Similarly, Edy Minguzzi has remarked, “After the expansion of Jupiter, Saturn represents limits and contraction: openness to the social dimension gives way to detachment and Saturnine solitude, dynamism to stasis, action to contemplation [trans. mine]” (*L’enigma forte: Il codice occult della Divina Commedia* [Genoa: ECIG, 1989], 217).

¹²⁸ “eran li occhi miei rifissi... / ...e l’animo con essi, / e da ogni altro intent s’era tolto” (*Par.* 21.1-3).

¹²⁹ Rabuse, “Saturne” 16. On *Juno Saturnia*, see William S. Anderson, “Juno and Saturn in the *Aeneid*,” *Studies in Philology* 55.4 (1958), 519-32.

¹³⁰ Carroll 338. St. Gregory had described the Incarnation itself in terms precisely analogous to Beatrice’s self-temperance: “For that immutable nature, which immanent renews all things, would, if it had seen fit to appear to us in its true guise, have set us afire with its radiance rather than given us new life. But God tempered the brightness of His majesty before our eyes...” (*Hom.* 2.14; 27).

untaught men” of Latium, where Vergil’s Saturn was king (*Aen.* 8.321). Finally, Beatrice herself exhorts Dante, “Fix your mind after your eyes [Ficca di retro a li occhi tuoi la mente]” (*Par.* 21.16). The resulting “climate” befits the sphere of Saturn from which, “according to Macrobius, contemplative virtue descends” to the soul.¹³¹

Dante does not explicitly mention another important detail until the pilgrim’s question in *Par.* 21.58-60: the silence of Saturn’s sphere. With this question we become aware that the Saturnine contemplatives are the first of the blessed souls who are not audibly singing the *laus perennis* of heaven, and we recall that a disposition to silence is a traditional Saturnine trait.¹³² The poet nowhere uses the actual word *silenzio* in these cantos, however, but prefers instead derivatives of St. Benedict’s own term for monastic silence, *taciturnitas*.¹³³ As Terrence Kardong suggests, in *RB* 6 the term seems to indicate the human practice of keeping silence or limiting speech, rather than general physical silence or absence of sound.¹³⁴ The pilgrim’s question “why in this wheel the sweet symphony of Paradise is silent [tace]” (*Par.* 21.58-9) can then be read as a tacit acknowledgment that the sweet symphony of the saints’ eternal praise of God still goes on. In other words, the Divine Office—already considered by Dante’s time “the proper and distinctive work of the Benedictine, his lot and his mission”—is not interrupted in the sphere where we would most expect to find it.¹³⁵ But commenting on *RB* 6, Georg Holzherr quotes Evagrius, “In

¹³¹ Tommaseo, comm. *Par.* 21.13, *Dartmouth*; cf. Macrobius, *In Somn.* 11.12.14.

¹³² See, for instance, Albumasar, *Liber* 5, 312: “Et significat prolixitatem cogitationis et paucitatem locutionis et scientiam secretorum...[emphasis mine].”

¹³³ Cf. esp. *RB* 6, “De Taciturnitate,” and the references to silence as *tacer/tace* in *Par.* 21.47, 49, and 58 (Ernest Hatch Wilkins & Thomas Goddard Bergin, eds., *A Concordance to the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* [Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap P, 1966], 555).

¹³⁴ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P, 1996), 119, 120-1. While Kardong translates *taciturnitas* in the title as “silence,” as the object of the preposition *propter* in v. 2 he glosses it as “the intrinsic value of silence” (120). Benedictine commentators typically dispense with two misreadings of the term and of ch. 6 as a whole: first, the pejorative sense of “taciturnity” common at least to English, French, and Italian and apparently so congenial to the negative associations of Saturn, and second, the intention to impose absolute or perpetual silence (an argument often raised in later polemics with the Trappists). See for example Paul Delatte, *A Commentary on the Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. & ed. Justin McCann (Latrobe, P.A.: The Archabbey P, 1959), 92. Delatte quotes St. Hildegard of Bingen’s objection to the second interpretation: “*Inhumanum est hominem in taciturnitate semper esse et non loqui*” (*PL* 147.1056, qtd. in Delatte 92).

¹³⁵ Delatte 134.

silence we worship the ineffable One.”¹³⁶ The contemplatives perform the praise of God mentally, which is higher and sweeter than to perform it vocally.¹³⁷ St. Peter Damian also indicates that the silence too, like Beatrice’s grave aspect, acts as a condescension to the pilgrim, a way of sparing him until he is fully prepared (ll. 61-3).

Besides the Saturnine atmosphere, however, we also have the two references to the planet itself. In both references the poet omits the actual name “Saturn,” imparting to the planet’s designation itself a tacit quality.¹³⁸ The first reference occurs in Beatrice’s opening words to the Pilgrim: “We have risen to the seventh splendor [Noi sem levati al settimo splendore] which beneath the breast of the burning Lion rays down now mingled with its power” (*Par.* 21.113-15).¹³⁹ The initial identification of this sphere as the seventh refers directly to the astrology of Saturn as the seventh planet, and thus evokes the parallel sevenths of the two series we have mentioned previously: among the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit,

¹³⁶ Georg Holzherr, *The Rule of Benedict: An Invitation to the Christian Life*, trans. Mark Thamert (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P, 2016), 130.

¹³⁷ Furthermore, St. Peter Damian’s reply in *Par.* 21.61-3 comparing the potential effects of hearing the contemplatives’ song to those of seeing Beatrice’s smile in this sphere points forward to the thunderous cry at the end of canto twenty-one and Beatrice’s explanation of it in *Par.* 22.10-12, which we shall consider shortly.

¹³⁸ Giuseppe Mazzotta explains this in rhetorical terms as a use of “periphrastic construction, or ‘circuitus eloquendi’... meant to foreground the workings of poetic metaphor by which the proper name of each planet is both revealed and hidden” (*Vision* 168). Similarly, William Franke argues that Dante’s frequent reticence “in using—or rather avoiding—certain proper names” serves the purpose of an apophatic theology or ineffability topos writ large (1091). Thus, divine things are only rarely pointed to with proper names, whereas terrestrial places are often named with a minute precision that itself “evokes from them the nameless, unique reality of the individual place that is named” (“The Place of the Proper Name in the Topographies of the *Paradiso*,” *Speculum* 87.4 [2012], 1092). Only once in the entire *Commedia* does the poet name Saturn directly without any recourse to mythological circumlocution—i.e. in the description of the optimal time for prophetic dreaming in *Pur.* 19. “At the hour when the day’s heat, overcome by Earth and at times by Saturn, can no more warm the cold of the moon... [Ne l’ora che non può ’l calor diurno / intepidar più ’l freddo de la luna, / vinto da terra, e talor da Saturno]” (*Pur.* 19.1-3).

¹³⁹ “Noi sem levati al settimo splendore, / che sotto ’l petto del Leone ardente / raggia mo misto giù del suo valore” (*Par.* 21.13-5). The cold planet is tempered not only because Leo in general opposes Saturn by his heat, but because the “petto” (the breast or heart) of the Lion, the star Regulus, is of the same nature as Mars and Jupiter according to Ptolemy (*Quad.* 1.9). In *Ode* 3.29.19, Horace refers to Regulus as “*stella vesani Leonis*,” emphasizing the star’s association with extreme heat on the order of Sirius, and Helen Henze thus misses the reference to Regulus by the singular *stella* when she renders the line, “savage Leo’s stars are raging” (*The Odes of Horace*, trans. Helen Rowe Henze [Norman, O.K.: U of Oklahoma, 1961], 70; cf. Horus, *Odes & Epodes*, ed. & trans. Niall Rudd [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 2004], 212, 213). “Regulus” was Copernicus’s denomination, a diminutive of “Rex.” Ptolemy called it “*basiliskos aster*,” and the Romans, “*Basilica Stella*” (Hinkley 255-56). The current name of the star is therefore too late to associate it with monastic *regulae* in Dante’s poem. It is interesting to note, however, that the poet uses the term *rege* to refer to Saturn in the fourteenth canto of *Inferno* (l. 96). Perhaps a connection between the divine star himself and the monastic *regulae* is anticipated in the *Commedia*’s first cantica.

wisdom, by which the “higher part of the reason...contemplates Divine things in themselves,” and among the seven liberal arts, astrology itself, the highest and most difficult art by which the reason considers the heavens in themselves.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, while the symbolical week of apocalyptic tradition follows the Chaldean system of order based on the planetary hour of dawn each day, nevertheless the seventh sphere certainly signifies the seventh day, “given to man for a rest,” which Christian tradition identifies with contemplation.¹⁴¹ Significantly, the reference to the seventh splendor also refers to the specific astral influence of Saturn, which is here literally “tempered” by the influence of the Lion’s breast.¹⁴² While some scholars make of Leo’s ardor a purely inward phenomenon, Dante’s choice of contemplative figures suggests that Saturn’s cold and the Lion’s heat represent a conjunction of contemplation and “the ardent spirit of struggle and action.”¹⁴³ It is yet another instance of the contemplatives’ paradoxical interplay of restrictive cleaving to God and loving condescension toward fellow human beings.

¹⁴⁰ Hugh, *Didasc.* 2.11 (68). In his *Lectura Dantis* on Canto 21, Georges Güntert also notes the prominent role of the number seven throughout the canto. See “Canto XXI,” *Lectura Dantis Turicensis, Vol. III: Paradiso*, ed. Georges Güntert & Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002), 332-3.

¹⁴¹ “[W]e know most certainly that holy Scripture is wont to put the number seven for perfection, whence also it tells us that on the seventh day the Lord rested from His works; and it is hence too, that the seventh day was given to man for a rest” (St. Gregory the Great, *Mor.* 1.14.18; 40). Cf. the interpretation of the Sabbath in St. Augustine, *De civ.* 22.30, and see also St. Gregory’s *Homilies on Ezekiel 1.3.11*, where the number seven itself signifies contemplation (St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson [London: Penguin, 2003], 1090-1; St. Gregory the Great, *The Homilies of St. Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Theodosia Gray, ed. Juliana Cownie [Etna, C.A.: CTOS, 1990], 35-6). Thus, Sunday is named for the Sun’s governance of the hour of dawn on that day, Monday for the Moon’s, Tuesday for Mars’s, Wednesday for Mercury’s, Thursday for Jupiter’s, Friday for Venus’s, and Saturday for Saturn’s. On the symbolical “week” in the Apocalypse, see Austin Farrar, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse* (Eugene, O.R.: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 37.

¹⁴² Neither Grandgent nor Singleton makes any comment on the fact that Dante specifies the location of Saturn in Leo as “sotto il *petto* del Leone ardente [beneath the *breast* of the burning Lion]” (*Par.* 21.14). Grandgent merely comments, “Saturn, ‘the seventh brightness,’ being in line with the constellation of Leo, its cold influence ‘now radiates downward’ mitigated by the heat of the Lion” (848, n. 13-15). Singleton first quotes Grandgent’s comment, and then comments further on “Leone ardente:” “The reference is to Leo the Lion, constellation and fifth sign of the zodiac” (*Par.* II 21.14; 347). But the Arabic system of twenty-eight lunar “mansions” across the twelve signs of the Zodiac divides Leo into four different mansions, each with its own characteristics and effects. The breast of Leo refers to the star Regulus, one of the brightest stars in the sky and the central star of the tenth mansion, which in turn is known as the “Brow of the Lion,” *Algebra*, and extends from Cancer 25.42.51 to Leo 8.34.18. See the influential Arabic treatise *Picatrix* 1.4.11 (Lat. translation, 13th century) in Dan Attrell & David Porreca, trans., *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic* (University Park, P.A.: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2019), 48. On the inclusion of Regulus see Christopher Warnock, *The Mansions of the Moon: A Lunar Zodiac for Astrology and Magic*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Renaissance Astrology, 2019), 66.

¹⁴³ Giuseppe Giacalone (1968), comm. *Par.* 21.13, *Dartmouth*; Giuseppe Ledda, “Agiografia e Autoagiografia nel Paradiso,” *Atti dell’Accademia di Scienze Arti e Lettere di Modena: Memorie Scientifiche, Giuridiche, Letterarie* 8.18

The second reference to the planet occurs ten lines later when the Poet introduces his vision of the golden ladder of the contemplatives with the words: “Within the crystal which bears the name, circling round the world of its beloved leader, beneath whom [sotto cui] every wickedness lay dead...” (*Par.* 21.25-27).¹⁴⁴ In this instance the Poet explicitly invokes the associations of the Golden Age under the earthly rule of Saturn. Additionally, this is the only instance where the poet uses the term “crystal” to refer to a planetary sphere, giving occasion for the fourteenth-century commentator in the *Chiose Ambrosiane* to note, “Saturn, which is cold and dry, is likened to a crystal, which is ice dried from the cold into a stone.”¹⁴⁵ Aside from the already discussed relevance of that myth to the sphere of the contemplatives, we may note that the line invokes Saturn as a figure of control and order, akin to temperance itself.¹⁴⁶ We may also recall that the construction used here to recall the myth directly

(2015), 323. Flanders Dunbar speaks of Leo’s effects as “the glow of devotion and contemplation,” but he soon adds, “The final teaching is the value of contemplation shown in action, since contemplative souls appear in Saturn, which is not only cold and slow, but inspirer of external rather than internal activity” (*Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the Divine Comedy* [N.Y.: Russell & Russell, 1961], 77, 78). It is interesting to note, however, that St. Gregory the Great uses the expression “the ardor of contemplation” in connection with ecstatic experience in his *Life of St. Benedict* (*Dial.* II.3.981). Cf. Adalbert de Vogüé’s edition of the Latin text with French translation in *Dialogues, Tome II: Livres I-III, Sources Chrétiennes* 260 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 146; and Terrence Kardong’s translation in *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great: Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P, 2009), 23. Astrological lore also assigns a judicial effect to a Saturn transit in Leo, consistent with the nature of the angelic Thrones. Thus, Chaucer’s Saturn in ll. 2461-2 of the *Knight’s Tale* says, “I do vengeance and pleyn correccioun, / Whil I dwelle in the signe of the leoun” (F.N. Robinson, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961], 41). On the modern misunderstandings of the Middle English terms for these effects see Walter E. Weese, “‘Vengeance and Pleyn Correccioun:’ KnT 2461,” *MLN* 63.5 (1948), 331-3. Of course, Chaucer could be referring to Leo’s “eyes” or “tail” rather than his breast. Those particular stellar loci, the ninth and twelfth lunar mansions respectively (*lambda* and *beta leonis*), are associated with more negative effects (Warnock 64, 73). Carroll connects the judicial effects of the Lion’s ardor with the “thunder-peat of judgment” at the end of the canto (330).

¹⁴⁴ “Dentro al cristallo che ’l vocabol porta, / cerchiando il mondo, del suo caro duce / sotto cui giacque ogne malizia morta” (*Par.* 21.25-7). The use of *vocabol* instead of *nome* in *Par.* 21.25 is intriguing. Not only does the poet not use Saturn’s name, he doesn’t even refer to his “name” as such, as a personal appellation, but as a vocabulary word (“*vocabol*”) to be looked up in a glossary or lexicon. Other uses of *vocabol* in the *Commedia* add to the interest. The name of one other planet is called a *vocabol* without being given, i.e., Venus (*Par.* 8.11). The accusative form of the noun *terra*—Saturn’s element—is called a *vocabol* in *Par.* 18.94. Then *vocabol* is used twice in *Purgatorio*: first, to refer to the name (*nome*) of a river (the Archiano) near Romuald’s Camaldoli hermitage whose name (*vocabol*) is said to be lost (*vano*) when it flows into the Arno (*Pur.* 5.94-97); and second, to the name of the Arno itself when it is deliberately suppressed by the pilgrim, who prefers that it be lost or perish (*pèra*) (*Pur.* 14.26). In his *Life of St. Benedict*, St. Gregory the Great uses the Latin *vocabulum* only once, to refer to the name of the cave where St. Benedict dwelt as a hermit (*Dial.* II.1.3.30; Vogüé, *Dialogues* 130; Kardong, *Life*, 7). In all other naming phrases, he uses *nomine*, *dicitur*, *dicebatur*, or *vocatur*.

¹⁴⁵ *Chiose Ambrosiane* (c. 1355), comm. *Par.* 21.25, Dartmouth.

¹⁴⁶ Tambling 633.

parallels another reference to Saturn as ruler of the Golden Age much earlier in the *Commedia*. In *Inferno* 14.94-6, Vergil introduces the figure of the ruined Old Man of Crete¹⁴⁷ with the words “In the middle of the sea there lies a wasted country, . . . which is named Crete, under whose [sotto ’l cui] king the world once was chaste.”¹⁴⁸ The construction itself closely parallels *Par.* 21.25-27, but in Hell the adverb “once [già]” gives the reference a more nostalgic, even elegiac tone that anticipates the Saturnine speakers’ judgments of their orders’ moral decline. Furthermore, both characterizations of Saturn’s earthly rule recall Vergil’s description of Saturn in Italy, where he “brought . . . unschooled men together [and] gave them laws” (*Aen.* 8.321-2).¹⁴⁹ This tradition is consistent with the traditional nature of the angelic thrones, the celestial movers of Saturn, as creatures of judgment.¹⁵⁰

These verbal signs of Saturn’s rule over the sphere are continued and paralleled by visual and auditory signs arranged by the poet as the *intercolumnia* of a monastic cloister walk.¹⁵¹ We have already

¹⁴⁷ The Old Man of Crete itself recalls the decline of the ages evoked by the intertextualities of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue in Daniel 2 and Ovid’s account of the four ages in *Metamorphoses* 1.89-150. I believe John A. Scott is correct to argue that this decline does not form a part of Dante’s grand historical narrative (“Canto XIV: Capaneus & the Old Man of Crete,” *Lectura Dantis, Inferno: A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, & Charles Ross [Berkeley, C.A.: U of California, 1998], 192-93). Nevertheless, the association is there poetically, and *Par.* 21 and 22 themselves constitute sufficient proof that Dante sees specific instances of decline and ruin within the larger context of history. He expresses this in general terms when he has St. Benedict say, “The flesh of mortals is so soft that on earth a good beginning does not last from the springing of the oak to the bearing of the acorn [La carne d’i mortali è tanto blanda, / che giù non basta buon cominciamento / dal nascer de la quercia al far la ghianda]” (*Par.* 22.85-87). Singleton certainly sees the theme of decline in *Inf.* 14, as does Mazzotta (see Singleton, *Inf.* II, 14.96, and Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U, 1979], 26). Mazzotta also identifies the Old Man of Crete in *Inf.* 14 with Saturn himself (*Dante* 26-7).

¹⁴⁸ “In mezzo mar siede un paese guasto, / diss’ elli allora, ‘che s’appella Creta, / sotto ’l cui rege fu già ’l mondo casto” (*Inf.* 14.91-93).

¹⁴⁹ Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.321-2; in Robert Fitzgerald, trans., *The Aeneid* (N.Y.: Random House, 1983), 240.

¹⁵⁰ Unless we consider *Par.* 21.108 a direct reference to the thrones *rather* than to literal thunders punning on the thrones, the Saturnine angelic order like Saturn himself is nowhere directly named in Cantos 21-22. In Venus’s sphere, however, Cunizza mentions them to the pilgrim when she says, “Aloft are mirrors—you name them Thrones—whence God in judgment shines upon us [Sù sono specchi, voi dicete Troni, / onde refulge a noi Dio giudicante]” (*Par.* 9.61-2).

¹⁵¹ Carruthers argues that cloisters are part of the mnemotechnical toolkit used by monastic writers in the Middle Ages:

The other richly rememorative structure in monastic architecture is the cloister, a moderately sized quadrangle, well lighted in all seasons, surrounded by intercolumnia which, as at the Cistercian abbey of Fontenay, “divide” the space within the gallery walks into a series of visual cellae. These are especially evident as, diurnally and seasonally, sunlight of varying intensity moves through the cloister. In many cloisters the capitals, set at eye level, were carved with narrative scenes “told” summamim; even Cistercian cloisters had simple but subtly various patterns of capitals. Like the church, the cloister has its ductus, its

mentioned the unique silence of this sphere, as well as Beatrice's grave and unprecedented omission of a smile when they ascend there. Beatrice's reference to "the steps [le scale] of the eternal palace" in *Par.* 21.7-8, however, prepare the stage for the most outstanding emblem of the circle of Saturn, the golden ladder¹⁵² of *Par.* 21.28-30: "I saw, of the color of gold on which a sunbeam is shining, a ladder [scaleo] rising up so high that my sight might not follow it."¹⁵³ As St. Benedict will indicate in *Par.* 22.70-72, the emblem is a reappearance of the stairway/ladder (*scala* in the Vulgate) that the Patriarch Jacob saw covered in ascending and descending angels in Gen. 28:12.¹⁵⁴ As such, the ladder is an ancient image of heavenly ascent, allegorized and mystically interiorized in the Christian spiritual tradition, though it is also found in the mystery religions and Neoplatonic philosophy.¹⁵⁵

very predictability and simplicity—its "silence"—giving it extraordinary cognitive flexibility. (Carruthers, *Craft* 272)

For a brief overview of the monastic cloister, see Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, N.J.: HiddenSpring, 2003), 258-60. Minguzzi describes Saturn's sphere in passing as "the enclosure of the cloister, which closes out the event-devouring time and gives access to the staircase that opens the sight to the perception of God..." (224).

¹⁵² It is not often noticed that the nature of the *scaleo* itself is rather ambiguous. As Ernest Wilkins has shown, the only other use of the word in fourteenth-century Italian is in *Pur.* 15.36 with the meaning "stairway" specifically rather than "ladder." Dante in other places uses *scala*, which in Latin and Italian can mean either "stairway" or "ladder," in reference to the *scaleo* of *Par.* 21.29. Given the various uses of the term coupled with the properties the poet ascribes to the *scaleo*, Wilkins concludes that in the sphere of Saturn Dante imagines a stairway, not a ladder. See Ernest H. Wilkins, "Dante's Celestial *Scaleo*: Stairway of Ladder?" *Romance Philology* 9 (1955), 216-22. The strength of the specific image, however, is not enough to prevent the poetic and contemplative associations of *scala* and *gradus* from extending to ladders and their rungs. I shall continue to use the term "ladder" since that is Singleton's translation and because it is clearly what St. Benedict himself had in mind (Wilkins 219).

¹⁵³ "di color d'oro in che raggio traluce / vid' io uno scaleo eretto in suso / tanto, che no seguiva la mia luce" (*Par.* 21.28-30).

¹⁵⁴ St. Augustine interprets the ascending angels with reference to the Pauline ascent to Paradise in 2 Cor. 12:2-4, an experience with which Dante expressly identifies his own in *Paradiso*. See St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus CXXIV* 7.23 (PL 35.1449), and Dante, *Inf.* 2.28-30, as well as *Letter to Can Grande* 28 (Haller 109). Brant Pitre observes that "Jacob sees the angels ascending and descending upon the staircases of the Temple, engaged in liturgical worship" ("Jesus, the New Temple, & the New Priesthood," *Letter & Spirit* 4, *Temple & Contemplation* [2008], 55).

¹⁵⁵ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Lansing, M.I.: Michigan State U, 1967), 76. Alison Morgan surveys narratives of heavenly ladders antecedent to Dante in *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2007), 37-46. Morgan notes that the ladder of St. Perpetua's vision (third century) was also gold, though she asserts without argument that what Dante saw in Paradise was a ladder not a stairway (41, 43).

But while Silvio Pasquazi rightly notes that for Dante, Jacob's ladder arrives through the mediation of St. Benedict's own use of the image in *RB* 7, "the ladder of humility,"¹⁵⁶ in the context of Saturn's sphere the meaning of ascent and descent upon the ladder differs markedly from that ascribed to them in *RB* 7.¹⁵⁷ According to St. Benedict's ladder of humility, ascent can only mean the practice of humility, whereas descent must mean the opposite—pride (*RB* 7.7).¹⁵⁸ But this is a tropological reading of Gen. 28:12, whereas the more common allegorical or anagogical reading associates the ascent with approach to God (by contemplation) and descent with an inevitable and sometimes desirable return to earthly, human things. This is a central and pervasive theme of our cantos, related to the dialectic of contemplative and political virtue.¹⁵⁹ The ascent to God by contemplation is closely associated with ascetic withdrawal, temperate restriction, and making oneself small by humility. But these are not sufficient. As St. Gregory the Great repeatedly emphasizes, the contemplatives have a duty to deliver to

¹⁵⁶ "La rappresentazione, dunque, della scala di Giacobbe arriva a Dante dal XXVIII capitol della Genesi *attraverso la mediazione* del VII capitol della Regula... [emphasis mine]" (Silvio Pasquazi, *Il Canto XXII del Paradiso* [Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1965], 31). Indeed, Pasquazi sees a direct equation of Saturn's ladder with its use in *RB* 7 in *Par.* 22.68-75, where refusal to climb the ladder is the same thing as neglect of the *Rule* (Pasquazi 30-1).

The ladder of St. Benedict's *Rule* comes by way of *Regula Magistri* 10.5-9, where the content of ten of the "steps" comes from St. John Cassian's *Institutes* 4.39.2. See Luke Eberle, trans., *The Rule of the Master* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1977), 131; and Boniface Ramsey, trans., *John Cassian: The Institutes* (N.Y.: The Newman P, 2000), 100. While St. Cassian generally designates his degrees of humility as "signs," the comment on *RB* 7.10 in *RB1980* notes that he also refers to some of them as "*gradus*" (*RB1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry et al. [Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P], 193).

¹⁵⁷ In my interpretation of this difference, however, I differ from that of Zane D.R. Mackin in his article on *Par.* 21. Mackin seems determined to exalt the role of St. Peter Damian in the sphere of Saturn at the expense of St. Benedict, who he doesn't think really belongs there (!). As a result, he presents the emblem of the ladder in a way that suggests Dante chose to follow Damian's references to Jacob's ladder as an ascent to contemplation, while rejecting St. Benedict's use of the ladder in *RB* 7 to depict the ascent by humility. See Zane D.R. Mackin, "Contemplation and Economic Justice in Dante's *Paradiso* 21," *Quadrante* 20 (2019), 117. While it is true that Dante does not strictly follow the logic of Jacob's ladder according to *RB* 7, nevertheless *Par.* 22.70-75 explicitly identifies the ladder with St. Benedict's *Rule*, and contra Mackin, the ladder's goal in *RB* 7.67-70 of "perfect love which casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18) does not merely represent an "approach to the good" as opposed to the attainment of heaven (Mackin 117). Yes, by removing the Master's elaborate eschatological vision (*RM* 10.87-120), St. Benedict emphasizes with Cassian (*Inst.* 4.39.3) the degree to which perfect love can be attained while still on earth. But what we have in *RB* 7 is not therefore un-eschatological, i.e. it does not exclude heaven, but is rather what the biblical scholar C.H. Dodd famously called a "realized eschatology."

¹⁵⁸ Even here though, descent may admit of another meaning, since St. Benedict's own biographer, St. Gregory, equates "the ascension of our humility" with "the Descent of Truth" (*Hom.* 5.16; 54).

¹⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that while St. Benedict will later complain that monks on earth neglect to ascend the ladder (*Par.* 22.73-4), in Paradise itself Dante sees the most holy monks only descending it (*Par.* 21.31-2). Aquinas had already explained in the sphere of the Sun that in Paradise "none descends [that stair] but to mount again [quella scala / u' senza risalir nessun discende]" (*Par.* 10.87).

other human beings what they have contemplated on high.¹⁶⁰ Thus, a descent by means of return to the world, speaking out the word of God in active love and condescension to others, becomes a necessary calling of the contemplative.¹⁶¹

Another sign, which occurs in close conjunction with the image of the ladder, is the poet's simile comparing the contemplative souls moving up and down the ladder to *pole*, or "jackdaws:"¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ "...[W]hoever benefits by beholding spiritual things must by telling of them deliver them also to others" (Gregory, *Hom.* 2.2.4; 172). See also Gregory, *Hom.* 1.3.5, 1.5.13, 1.11.28, *Mor.* 6.37.60, 7.15.18, *Regula Pastoralis* 2.5 (St. Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, trans. George Demacopoulos [Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS, 2007], 58-60). St. Gregory often expresses this idea in terms of a return from contemplation to action, with a stress on the spiritual strength regained from a temporary return from heavenly to earthly things (*Mor.* 6.37.56; 9.8.8; 10.15.31). In one place the "ascent" of contemplation is paralleled by the "descent" of exercising judgment, *à la* angelic thrones (*Mor.* 2.7.9).

¹⁶¹ In regards to *Par.* 21-22, perhaps the most important uses of the ladder image after St. Benedict's are 1) the ladder on Lady Philosophy's dress with the Greek Π at the bottom for *praxis* or action and Θ at the top for *theoria* or contemplation in Boethius, *De consolazione* 1.1 (Boethius 132-5); 2) St. Romuald's vision of Jacob's ladder indicating the location of the Alpine hermitage of Camaldoli in Rudolf of Camaldoli's *Liber regulae eremiticae* 10 (Rudolf of Camaldoli, "Book of the Eremitical Rule," Peter-Damian Belisle, trans., *Camaldolese Spirituality: Essential Sources* [henceforth Belisle, *Sources*] [Bloomington, O.H.: Ercam, 2007], 236); 3) St. Peter Damian's reference to the eremitical life as "Jacob's ladder" and a "golden road" in *Dominus vobiscum* 19 [47] (Belisle, *Sources* 205); and 4) St. Bonaventure's ladder of ascent to God via contemplation of creation in *Itinerarium mentis* 1.2 (Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, ed. Stephen F. Brown [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993], 5). Two of these (St. Romuald's and St. Peter Damian's) involve persons who appear in the Saturn cantos, and two of them (Boethius's and St. Bonaventure's, both of whom appear in the circle of the Sun) involve explicit identifications of the ladder's path and goal with contemplation. Guido Vitarelli also points out that St. Romuald's ladder is not merely an obscure literary incident, but "...l'episodio fu spesso volte frescato nei portici dei conventi o nelle tavole d'altare" ("Un inventario di codici del secolo XIII et le vicende della biblioteca, dell'archivio e del Tesoro di Fonte Avellana (Continuazione)," *La Bibliofilia* 21 [1919-20], 76).

It is also worth noting the more metaphorical use of "ascending steps" imagery (without explicit reference to a *scala*) throughout late antique and early medieval thought. Thus, St. Augustine describes the seven gifts of the Spirit in Is. 11:2-3 as a "gradually ascending series" leading to "the seventh step, wisdom" in *De Sermone Domini in Monte* 1.4 (*PL* 34.1234); St. Gregory the Great refers to the "steps of ascent" to contemplation in the *Homilies on Ezekiel* 2.5.8-9 (*PL* 76.989D); and in the *Disputatio ad Vera Philosophia*, Alcuin of York refers to the liberal arts as "the seven degrees [gradus] of philosophy" (Gustavo Costa, "Dialectic and Mercury (Education, Magic and Religion in Dante." *The Divine Comedy and the Encyclopedia of Arts and Sciences: Acta of the International Dante Symposium, 13-16 Nov. 1983, Hunter College, New York* [Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1988], 44, n. 13). Georg Rabuse has devoted two publications to Dante's ladder: *Die goldene Leiter in Dantes Saturnhimmel* (Krefeld: Schriften und Vorträge des Petrarka-Instituts Köln, 1972), and "Saturne et l'échelle de Jacob," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 45 (1978), 7-31. I have relied on the latter.

¹⁶² *Pole* (pl. of *pola*) later became obsolete in Tuscan. The great commentator on the *Commedia*, Benvenuto da Imola (c. 1380), identifies the bird with the magpie genus, *pica*, and goes on to say that they, like contemplatives, love solitude and deserted places, and are humble and plain (comm. *Par.* 21.34, *Dartmouth*). Richard Holbrook, however, who derives *pola* from *Cornix paula* ("little crow"), states that the evidence generally suggests that Dante means "rook" or "(jack)daw," but that the word was applied to multiple species of bird in the fourteenth century (Richard T. Holbrook, "Romanic Lexicographical Miscellanies," *Modern Language Notes* 18.2 [1903], 43-4). The generally northern habitat of the rook would fit with the description of the birds trying to keep warm, but St. Isidore gives the daw (*monedula*) a particularly Saturnine character when he describes it as habitually carrying away and hiding gold (*Etymologies* 12.7.35; in Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, Vol. 2, trans. Priscilla Throop [Charlotte, V.T.:

And, as by their natural custom, the daws move about together, at the beginning of the day, to warm their cold feathers, then some fly away not to return, some wheel round to whence they had started, while others wheeling make a stay; such movements, it seemed to me, were in that sparkling, which came in a throng, as soon as it smote upon a certain step. (*Par.* 21.34-42)

The daws themselves, being of a black hue akin to the black of the Benedictine habit, are thus birds of Saturn like all black-colored birds.¹⁶³ With the reference to “cold [fredde] feathers” the passage also refers to one of the two elemental qualities of Saturn—that of being cold, or *frigidus* (Ptolemy, *Quad.* 1.4). It is generally agreed, however, that the overall description of three types of motion—straight line, circle, and spiral—refers to a threefold taxonomy of contemplation, originating with St. Dionysius and developed in an avian metaphor by Richard of St. Victor.¹⁶⁴ In other words, the simile depicts the proper activity of Saturnine souls—contemplation.¹⁶⁵

The last two signs of the space marked out for Saturn may seem fundamentally different from each other at first, but they are joined by a common purpose. The cry of the contemplatives at the end of *Par.* 21, which the poet refers to as a thunderclap (*il tuono*), recalls the cry of the souls beneath the altar in

MedievalMS, 2005], 66). It is noteworthy that the two species tended to flock together, easily leading to a confusion between them. See also ch. 51 in Holbrook’s *Dante and the Animal Kingdom* (N.Y.: AMS, 1966), 304-8.

¹⁶³ Rudolf Palgen, *Dantes Sternnglaube Beiträge zur Erklärung des Paradiso* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1940), 64, and Kay 242, referring to the twelfth-century Sephardic astrologer, Abraham Ibn Ezra (see Kay 270-73).

¹⁶⁴ Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4.8-9 (78); Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin Major* 1.5, in Richard of St. Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (N.Y.: Paulist, 1979), 158-60. Kay notes this reading as a general consensus (Kay 242). Dante refers to St. Dionysius’s writings numerous times, while Richard’s *De contemplatione* is one of three works on contemplation referred to in the *Epistle to Cangrande* “as analogues to the pilgrim’s quest for the vision of God” (Mazzotta, *Vision* 155).

¹⁶⁵ Although Dante uses this simile to describe what he sees in the seventh sphere of Paradise, making it akin to the illustrations of a traveler in Macaulay’s characterization of Dante’s similes, in this case “the things compared are not yoked together by a momentary poetic analogy...but by a profound philosophical analogy or even identity” (C.S. Lewis, “Dante’s Similes,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, collected by Walter Hooper [Cambridge: Canto, 1998], 71). In other words, the motions of the daws do not merely tell us what the Saturnine souls are doing visually, but what they are doing interiorly, spiritually. As Lewis says of this type of simile, “They are all the kind of similes which a philosopher could use in prose, and some of them may come from Dante’s philosophic sources” (Lewis, “Similes” 75). Here precisely we find this to be the case, since Dante has apparently borrowed the simile from the philosophical prose of Richard of St. Victor.

heaven in Rev. 6:10.¹⁶⁶ St. Gregory the Great ascribes the latter great *cry* to the blessed souls' great *desire* for God and his judgment (*Mor.* 2.7.11). So in one sense this cry is an act of contemplative ascent, a cleaving to God in accordance with the contemplative associations of Saturn. But it is also a moment of active "descent"—"I saw more flamelets from step to step descending" Dante says (*Par.* 21.136-7)—in that it seals St. Peter Damian's damning moral judgement on the avaricious and gluttonous bishops of the fourteenth century.¹⁶⁷ The contemplatives thus exercise judgment like the thrones who move Saturn's sphere, or like Saturn himself in his rule of the Golden Age and/or Latium, calling for Saturnine "vengeance and pleyn correccioun."¹⁶⁸ The term for "cry," *grido*, recalls the poet's reference in *Inf.* 14.102 to the cries (*grida*) of Rhea's corybantes protecting the infant Jupiter from his father, Saturn, but this time the cry does not shield but rather *expresses* the judgment of father upon sons—St. Peter Damian's successors as cardinals.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the active judgment of the contemplatives' cry also constitutes for Dante a new object of contemplation, the characteristic activity of Saturn's sphere. Just as for Damian "the thunders [troni] sound far lower down" in the profound abysses below the mountains (*Par.* 21.108), so for Dante the thunder (*tuono*) is a "deep sound [alto suono]" (*Par.* 21.140). For John Carroll, this recalls St. Bernard's interpretation of the angelic thrones contemplating the depth of God's judgments as having the potential to "violently shock" us. This echo from the thrones of divine judgment (again, Saturn's angelic movers) clearly has just such a shocking effect on the pilgrim.¹⁷⁰

The final sign of Saturn's sphere actually takes place just after Dante the pilgrim and Beatrice have ascended to the constellation Gemini in the sphere of the fixed stars. Here the reader may be surprised that, having ascended the ladder of contemplation (*Par.* 22.100-1), the pilgrim is now instructed

¹⁶⁶ It is worth noting that Dante uses a form of this word for thunderclap only three times in *Paradiso*, and all in the twenty-first canto. In the form *tuono* (*Par.* 21.142) it can mean both thunder/thunderclap and note ("tone"), in which latter sense it is used immediately after the reference to Caesar opening the temple of Saturn in *Pur.* 9.139. In the form *trono*, as we have seen, it can also form a pun on the word for the angelic "thrones" (*Par.* 21.12, 108).

¹⁶⁷ "vid' io più fiammelle / di grado in grado scendere" (*Par.* 21.136-7).

¹⁶⁸ Chaucer, *Knight's Tale* 2461; on the meaning of which see Weese 333.

¹⁶⁹ For Dante's likely source for the myth of Jupiter's birth see Ovid, *Fasti* 4.197-214.

¹⁷⁰ Carroll 345. Carroll refers to the interpretation of Eph. 3:18 in St. Bernard's *De consideratione* 5.14, as well as the references to the "depths" of God's judgments in Ps. 35:6 (Vul.) and Rom. 11:33.

to “look back downward” toward the world again (*Par.* 22.128). This is a vista in retrospect with a long literary history. Most immediately, Dante has in mind a famous episode from St. Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*: St. Benedict (the same one with whom the pilgrim has just spoken!) has a vision of divine light “that shone with such splendor that it surpassed daylight,” and immediately “the whole world was brought before his eyes as if collected in a single ray of sunlight.”¹⁷¹ So the view itself is already bound up with contemplation. Furthermore, St. Gregory’s account of this vision owes a great deal to a literary tradition that begins with Cicero’s *De Somnium Scipionis*, and which always serves to illustrate a doctrine of *contemptus mundi*.¹⁷² But while St. Benedict’s vision demonstrates that in the light of God this world is a paltry and fleeting thing (*Dial.* II.35.6-7), in his regard for the vision of the world itself we see his active love for it.¹⁷³ Similarly, Dante’s backwards glance tells us he has not forgotten the world even as he “smiled at [this globe’s] paltry semblance” (*Par.* 22.135). Surveying all of the seven spheres he calls the inhabited earth “The little threshing-floor which makes us so fierce” (*Par.* 22.151).¹⁷⁴ Like the contemplative souls themselves in the previous canto, Dante the pilgrim crowns his contemplative ascent with a “descent” that contains an act of judgment, in this case embracing a *contemptus mundi* which smiles and speaks fondly of its object.¹⁷⁵ Though St. Gregory’s emphasis on charity in the return from

¹⁷¹ St. Gregory, *Dial.* II.35.2-3; Kardong, *Life* 131-2. That the light which pours down in *Dial.* II.35.2 constitutes a vision of God emerges from St. Gregory’s explanation of the vision of the entire world to Peter the Deacon: “to a person who sees the Creator, every creature looks narrow by comparison....For when the contemplative soul is ravished by the light of God, it is dilated” (Kardong, *Life* 132).

¹⁷² See esp. T. Delforge, “*Songe de Scipion et vision de saint Benoît*,” *Revue bénédictine* 69.3-4 (1959), 351-4 and Pierre Courcelle, “La vision cosmique de saint Benoît,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 13 (1967), 110-4. Courcelle compares St. Benedict’s vision not only to Cicero but to Seneca, *Quaest. Nat., Praef.* 8; Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.5.1; St. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.18; and Boethius, *De cons.* 2.7 (see Vogüé’s note in Gregory, *Dial.* 239, n.5).

¹⁷³ St. Gregory, *Dial.* 240; Kardong, *Life* 1332-3. The dual implication of concern for earthly affairs and *contemptus mundi* is already present in Cicero, but for the Christian tradition the contemplative significance of the vision of the world was enhanced by the interpretation of it in Macrobius’s *Commentary*.

¹⁷⁴ “L’aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci” (*Par.* 22.151). Dante uses the same image in *De monarchia* 3.16.11: “in areola ista mortalium” (Dante, *Monarchy*, trans. & ed. Prue Shaw [Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2011], 93). It seems to me that the reference to the earth as “threshing-floor [aiuola]” recalls Daniel’s explanation of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the great statue (*Dan.* 2), intertextually referenced in conjunction with Saturn in *Inf.* 14, and first recalled in Saturn’s sphere by the construction in *Par.* 21.27 paralleling *Inf.* 14.96. The prophet Daniel tells the king that he had seen the statue (representing earthly history) smashed in judgment, its pieces becoming “like the chaff of a summer’s threshing-floor [quasi in favillam aestivae arae]” (*Dan.* 2:35). On *Par.* 22.135, see Alfonso Traina, “‘L’aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci:’ per la storia di un topos,” *Poeti Latini (e Neolatini): Note e saggi filologici* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1975), 305-335.

¹⁷⁵ Corbett 76.

contemplation to action may not appear self-evident in *Par.* 22, it is in fact for the sake of charitable moral instruction that Dante records his judgment upon the threshing-floor. Just as Lady Philosophy instructs the prisoner in Boethius's *De consol.* 2.7, so Dante the poet is preaching to the reader to give up the vain struggle for the things of this earth.¹⁷⁶ Contemplative love has momentarily become active judgment.

We have seen how Dante the poet deploys his astrological, mythological, philosophical, and theological lore in constructing the sphere of Saturn in *Par.* 21-22. Though the cantos nowhere feature the name of the god/planet itself, they invoke him by association with the language of contemplation, with restriction and judgment, with his status as the seventh of the ascending series, with the Golden Age, with the cry of the souls, and with the turn back toward the threshing-floor of the earth. As I have briefly suggested, all of this marks off the resulting space in the poem as a celestial cloister of Saturn where the thrones (*troni*) sound like thunder (*trono*) in judgment. It remains to consider the figures within.

¹⁷⁶ Boethius 216, 217.

4.

“And that one which stopped nearest to us”

Peter Damian

As we now proceed to examine each of the four contemplatives identified in the sphere of Saturn, we must keep firmly in mind the various Saturnine traits and associations we have seen, first in the ancient, late antique, and medieval sources in section two, and second in the atmosphere and signs of *Par.* 21-22 themselves in section three. Astrology and mythology give us a comprehensive portrait of an old man, cold and dried out, given to deep thought, silence, poverty, solitude, confinement, and self-denial. He was father of the gods and ruler of the Golden Age of the earth before his exile, and the realm of the blessed dead after it, and these positive aspects of his portrait are maintained and celebrated. Philosophy and theology refine this portrait so that Saturn becomes the source of the contemplative faculty and the virtue of wisdom in human beings, and because of his association with rulership and lawgiving, as well as with the angelic thrones, he is also closely connected with regulation, judgment, and the exercise of “political virtue,” to use Macrobius’s expression (*Comm.* 1.8.6-8). Lastly, Dante himself directly links Saturn with Astronomy, and thus with the observation and knowledge of the stars themselves.

As in the other spheres Dante passes through in *Paradiso*, the Poet identifies a number of souls by name in the sphere of Saturn. The first—and in Canto 21, the only—of these is the Ravennese monk, cardinal, reformer, and poet, St. Peter Damian (c. 1007-1072/3). While Damian tells the pilgrim “that Seraph who has his eye most fixed on God [quel serafin che ’n Dio più l’occhio ha fisso], could not satisfy your question” as to why he alone among his “consorts” was “predestined to this office,” there are no lack of basic, material reasons why Dante should have chosen him to be the initial representative of

Saturn (*Par.* 21.92-3, 77-8).¹⁷⁷ To begin with, if one is looking to populate a heaven of monastic hermits, Damian is by far the most prolific of them and can thus be taken quite literally as their spokesman. Damian also has the rare distinction among the hermits of being a poet, notably with a hymn to St. Benedict for Vespers of the Feast—still in use in monasteries—and the Dantesque *Rithmus de Gaudio Paradisi*.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps more importantly, much of St. Peter Damian’s corpus is taken up with *apologiae* for the eremitical life itself, including a *Vita* of the founder of the revived eremitic tradition to which Damian belonged, St. Romuald of Ravenna, who also appears in Saturn’s sphere and who will be treated in the final section of this thesis.¹⁷⁹ In addition, Dante likely wrote a good deal of *Paradiso* in or near Damian’s hometown of Ravenna, where his spiritual presence must have inspired the poet just as the city itself is widely thought to have done. In fact Damian’s connection to Ravenna may be an important reason for his inclusion in Saturn’s sphere.¹⁸⁰ James Pounder Whitney also speaks of a sympathy between the two men

¹⁷⁷ On St. Peter Damian, the best introductions in English are the relevant chapter of James Pounder Whitney’s *Hildebrandine Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1932) as well as his article, “Peter Damiani and Humbert,” *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 1.3 (1925), 225-48, Owen J. Blum, “The Monitor of the Popes: St. Peter Damian,” *Studi gregoriani per la storia di Gregorio VII e della riforma gregoriana* 2 (1947), 459-76, Owen J. Blum, *St. Peter Damian: His Teaching on the Spiritual Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1947), Patricia McNulty’s introduction and translated selections in Peter Damian, *Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life* (London: Faber, 1959), Irven Michael Resnick, *Divine Power and Possibility in St. Peter Damian’s De Divina Omnipotentia* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 7-19, Lino Vigilucci, *Camaldoli: A Journey into its History & Spirituality*, trans. Peter-Damian Belisle (Trabuco Canyon, C.A.: Source, 1995), 59-65, and the brief biography by Bernard McGinn in *The Doctors of the Church: Thirty-three Men and Women Who Shaped Christianity* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1999), 99-102. More recently, see Kenneth Russell, “Who Really Knows?—The Monk or the Scholar? Peter Damian’s Defense of Experiential Knowledge,” *American Benedictine Review* [hereafter *ABR*] 46.1 (1995), 3-23, Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071* (Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS, 2007), 278-8, 296-300, and Patricia Ranft, *The Theology of Peter Damian: Let Your Life Always Serve as a Witness* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America, 2012). The Life of Peter Damian by his disciple, John of Lodi, was published in a critical edition by Stephan Freund in his *Studien zur literarischen Wirksamkeit des Petrus Damiani* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1995), 203-65.

¹⁷⁸ *PL* 145.957D-958B; *The Song of S. Peter Damiani on the Joyes & Glory of Paradise*, ed. & trans. Stephen A. Hurlbut (Washington, D.C.: The Saint Albans P, 1928). In the seventeenth-century *editio princeps* by Gaëtani, reprinted in *PL* 145.861D-864A, the *Rithmus de Gaudio Paradisi* is entitled *Hymnus de Gloria Paradisi*. It is also sometimes known by its incipit, *Ad perennis vitae fontem*.

¹⁷⁹ See an English translation in Peter Damian, “The Life of Blessed Romuald,” Belisle, *Sources* 105-75, and the critical edition of the Latin in Peter Damian, *Vita Beati Romualdi*, ed. Giovanni Tabacco (Rome: Nella Sede dell’Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1957). I will cite the *Vita* in text as *VBR* followed by chapter number, and the location in the critical text in the notes under “Tabacco” followed by page number(s).

¹⁸⁰ See Tambling, “Saturn” 633 and Franke, *Divine Vision* 175-6. On Dante and Ravenna, see Mazzotta, “Life” 11, and especially E. Chiarini, “Ravenna,” *Enciclopedia Dantesca, Vol. 4* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1973), 861-6, and “Riflessioni su un vecchio problema: Dante e Ravenna,” *Atti del convegno internazionale di studi danteschi* (Ravenna, 1979), 217-37; as well as two key studies of the mosaics of the Ravenna churches as inspiration for Dante: William Stephany & Christie Fengler, “The Visual Arts: A Basis for Dante’s Imagery in *Purgatory* and

both broad and deep on the subject of corruption in the Italian church, and of the curious and suggestive kinship between the politics of *De Monarchia* and Damian's political theory, which had faded only to reappear with Dante.¹⁸¹ Finally, Kay notes the simple fact that Damian's Christian name is Peter, meaning "stone," and stones are linked to Saturn, according to Michael Scot among others.¹⁸²

For our purposes, however, we must start by noting two points about St. Peter Damian's life: his reputation as exemplar of the Saturnine practices of asceticism and contemplation, and his obedient return to active life interpreted in terms of the benevolent rule of the Golden Age and the judgment of the thrones. As to the first point, Benevenuto calls Damian "a man entirely contemplative and speculative."¹⁸³ His writings are indeed replete with contemplative teaching, as we shall see, but he is also especially renowned as a practitioner (and promoter) of the ascetic life. The *raison d'être* of the monasteries founded in the spirit of St. Romuald was a renewal of the practice of solitary eremitism in close conjunction with cenobitic monasticism, and the account of Damian's life in *Par.* 21.106-26 accordingly

Paradise," *Michigan Academician* 10.2 (1977), 127-41, and Rachel Jacoff, "Sacrifice and Empire: Thematic Analogies in San Vitale and the *Paradiso*," *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth* 1 (1985), 317-32.

Moreover, scholars occasionally note a tradition that Dante wrote much of his great poem in Damian's own monastic home of Fonte Avellana (Blum, *St. Peter Damian* 13, n. 50; cf. Whitney 97). Guido Vitarelli has offered extensive arguments for this tradition: the vivid (and accurate) description of the place in *Par.* 21.106-10; Boccaccio's testimony that Dante had stayed in the mountains near Urbino (an obscure village quite near Fonte Avellana); the bust and inscription from 1570 identifying the room where the poet had stayed; the testimonies of various authorities from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the probability that the monks would have been embarrassed by the notice in *Paradiso* for some centuries after; the evidence that unusual adjustments were made in the restoration of the buildings in the fourteenth century to preserve the room in question; and finally, the suitability of the place for Dante's purposes and circumstances during his exile. See Guido Vitarelli, "Un inventario di codici del secolo XIII et le vicende della biblioteca, dell'archivio e del Tesoro di Fonte Avellana," *La Bibliofilia* 20 (1918-19), 255-62. Gardner also believes Dante also wrote his Letter to the Cardinals from Fonte Avellana (Gardner 177-8, 301-2). The relevant part of the 1557 inscription at the hermitage reads: "HOCCE CVBICVLVM HOSPES IN QVO DANTHES ALIGHIERIVS HABITASSE IN EOQVE NON MINIMAM PRAECLARI AC PAENE DIVINI OPERIS SVI PARTEM COMPOSVISSE" (Vitarelli 1, 258).

On the other hand, Nicolangelo D'Acunto insists that none of these arguments are conclusive, and that against them we have Dante's confusion about Damian's tomb and his identity itself, coupled with the lack of evidence of his familiarity with Damian's writings, all of which would have been remedied by a stay at Fonte Avellana. See D'Acunto, "Dante lettore di Pier Damiani?" *Noctua* 8.1-2 (2021), 303-319.

¹⁸¹ Whitney 97, 135.

¹⁸² Kay 224. The reference to St. Peter by the Aramaic "Cephas" in *Par.* 21.125 helps to underscore the lapidary significance of both names (*ibid.* 224).

¹⁸³ Benevenuto, comm. *Par.* 21.43, *Dartmouth*.

focuses on his time at the hermitage of Fonte Avellana.¹⁸⁴ Apart from the basic asceticism of solitude, vigils, and fasting, Damian in particular was known for his defense of self-flagellation and for promoting the even more Saturnine penance of wearing chains.¹⁸⁵ The new hermits if anything appear more fully sons of Saturn than the mainstream Benedictines of the age. St. Peter Damian's reputation as the strict hermit, patriarch, and monastic founder all ties him to Saturn, with the astrological predisposition to solitude and that planet's mythological association with fatherhood and the giving of laws.

Under the influence "of the burning Lion," however, the austere hermit eventually left his solitude in obedience to the church's call to guide infirm souls.¹⁸⁶ Damian was made a cardinal and became an active participant in the Gregorian Reforms, in which he recalled Saturn the law-giver of *Aen.* 8.321-2 by zealously promoting ascetic rules among the clergy. In a judgment that seems to echo that of

¹⁸⁴ Belisle quotes Mansueto Della Santa: "Based on greater solitude, silence, and fasting, the Romualdian system of life imitated the ancient Egyptian anchoritism in the penitential ascetical sphere; for the rest, it faithfully referred to the observance of the Benedictine Rule" (Belisle, "Overview of Camaldolese History and Spirituality," *The Privilege of Love: Camaldolese Benedictine Spirituality*, ed. Peter-Damian Belisle [Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P, 2002], 9). See also Robert Hale, "Camaldolese Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P, 1993), 107. Henrietta Leyser insists that in fact a strict distinction between cenobitic and eremitic monasticism is anachronistic in the eleventh century (*Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150* [London: Macmillan, 1984], 2-3). Remarking on Dante's singular concern with Damian's eremitic life, Güntert observes, "Ma Dante lo immagina subito nell'eremo avellanese, quasi che la vita del santo abbia avuto inizio in quelle aeree solitudini dell'Appennino" (335).

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Wong, "The Threefold Good: Romualdian Charism and Monastic Tradition," Belisle, *Privilege* 95; Kenneth C. Russell, "Peter Damian's Whip," *ABR* 41 (1990), 21, n. 5. In a strikingly Saturnine passage of John of Lodi's *Vita Petri Damiani*, which Dante likely did not know (see D'Acunto), we read:

XVIII. Porro, dum ab exterioribus istis, licet sanctis et Deo gratis, ad dulcia eremi secreta tam pro refectione mentis, quam pro ablutione cuiuslibet contracti pulveris, redire decrevisset, nimia se inedia *cellulae* mactabat *ergastulo* quotidie praeter dies festos, ieiunando, cantabro pane cum hesterna aqua vescendo suoque corpori, licet senior iam confecto ac pluribus *ferries nexibus undique constricto*, a disciplinarum palmatarumque ictibus nequaquam suis vicibus indulgendo iugique psallendi, orandi, legendi atque dictandi studio insistendo. (Freund 251, emphasis mine)

¹⁸⁶ Cf. St. Gregory on the Prophet Moses: "while he was seized internally with contemplation, . . . busied himself with the affairs of the infirm" (*Pastoral Rule* 2.5; 59). St. Peter Damian makes the same comparison to Moses in his Letter 82 to Abbot Desiderius of Montecassino (Owen J. Blum, trans., *The Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 3: Letters 6-90* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1992], 239-40). It should be noted that this concern for others was a central aspect of the understanding of the eremitic life in the Romualdian tradition. Thus in his *Vita Beati Romualdi* 18, Damian describes Romuald's divine realization that he must not focus only on his own salvation as a part of his model of the eremitic life (Belisle, *Sources* 125). See Colin Phipps, "Romuald-Model Hermit: Eremitical Theory in St. Peter Damian's *Vita Beati Romualdi*, chapters 16-27," *Monks, Hermits, and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. W. Sheils (London: Blackwell, 1985), 69.

St. Benedict on the so-called “gyrovagues” (*RB* 1.10-11),¹⁸⁷ Dante had confined Pope Celestine V to hell for his “great refusal” in resigning the papacy to return to a solitary monastic life (*Inf.* 3.60).¹⁸⁸ Damian’s willingness to undertake the pastoral burden thus constitutes a “great consent,” opposed to what St. Benedict calls the “utterly wretched monastic ways [*miserrima conversatione*]” of the gyrovagues (*RB* 1.12). Like Saturn’s movers, the angelic thrones of Dionysian tradition, the stern cardinal pronounces righteous judgement on a corrupt and morally lax Church by his actions and his voluminous writings. From an astrological perspective, it is the effect in the saint’s life of cold Saturn’s tempering by Leo’s active heat.¹⁸⁹

In addition to the life of the eremitic reformer, St. Peter Damian’s writings also fit quite well into the milieu of Dante’s sphere of Saturn. While it seems that Dante may have been directly familiar only with Damian’s Letter 28, we cannot absolutely rule out the possibility that he may have known others.¹⁹⁰ Modern scholarly references to the saint are often preoccupied with two of his less influential but often misunderstood works, the *Liber Gomorrhianus* and *De divina omnipotentia* (Letters 31 and 119 respectively).¹⁹¹ We will leave these aside. Before moving on to other works, however, we must pause to

¹⁸⁷ Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. & trans. Bruce L. Venarde (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 2011), 19. All quotations from *RB* will be taken from Venarde’s edition and translation, cited in the notes hereafter as Benedict followed by page number.

¹⁸⁸ Kevin J. Newman, “Gyrovagues in Dante and St. Benedict,” *ABR* 54.4 (2003), 416-17.

¹⁸⁹ For a short survey of mostly the more elemental Saturnine qualities in John of Lodi’s *Life* of St. Peter Damian, see Kay 234.

¹⁹⁰ A century ago Francesco Flamini was quite sanguine on the subject in “Il canto di Pier Damiano: Saggio d’esegesi dantesca,” *La Rassegna* 3.1.6 (1916), 416. Arsenio Frugoli’s article on Damian for the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* took a much more conservative view (*Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Vol. 4, 491). But admittedly, D’Acunto’s arguments that Dante knew only Letter 28 strike me as rather formidable. A possible exception remains the possibility that the poet may have known the text at least of Damian’s *Rithmus* from the *Liber meditationum* that has been ascribed to the abbot John of Fécamp (d. 1078). But the *Liber* was generally attributed to St. Augustine in the later Middle Ages, and at any rate I don’t know whether there would have been any manuscripts available to Dante that would have clearly indicated Damian’s authorship. On the inclusion of Damian’s hymn in the *Liber*, see Hurlbut 4.

¹⁹¹ On the former, see the English translation in Owen J. Blum, trans., *The Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 2: Letters 31-60* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1990), 3-53, and an assessment in Kenneth C. Russell, “Peter Damian’s *Liber Gomorrhianus*: The Text vs. the Scholarly Tradition,” *ABR* 49.3 (1998), 299-315. On the latter see the complete English translation in Blum, trans., *The Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 4: Letters 91-120* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1998), 344-86, the brief introduction to Blum’s partial translation in Wippel & Wolter 140-2, and Irven Resnick’s monograph, *Divine Power and Possibility in St. Peter Damian’s De Divina Omnipotentia* (cited above). In both cases, a careful study of the document in question is enough to show many of the scholarly references to it to be highly misleading at best. Edward Grant, for instance, claims that

consider St. Peter Damian as a monastic legislator and law-giver, an important Saturnine trait relative to monastics. First of all, it must be acknowledged that Damian did not author a full-fledged Rule. Rather, as Owen Blum observes, he took St. Benedict's *Rule* as the basis for the life of the monasteries and hermitages under his care, making the great *Rule* "the foundation of his own rule."¹⁹² That said, Damian did compose a letter (Letter 18) to the brethren of Fonte Avellana that Blum characterizes as "constitutions which augmented and explained the *Regula monachorum*" and which may be thought of on the order of a monastic customary.¹⁹³ Thus, in Letter 18.14, having explained the strict fasting customs of Fonte Avellana, Damian writes, "In regard to other monastic practices, however, whatever is done in monasteries of strict and regular observance [monasticae institutionis observationibus quidquid in regulari, et districto monasterio tenetur—*i.e.*, in careful observance of St. Benedict's *Rule*] is also observed with careful attention and facility here..." going on to summarize a number of basic Benedictine observances.¹⁹⁴ Second, St. Peter composed a long letter (Letter 50) to a monk named Stephen, though he also addresses it to "my brothers," who had left a cenobium to become a hermit in one of Damian's foundations.¹⁹⁵ Blum refers to this letter as an "exposition of the Rule contained in Letter 18. It is an extended description of the eremitic life in general, and of the laws and customs of his institute." Thus, Damian refers to fulfilling Stephen's request "to be instructed in the rule of the eremitic life [eremiticae vitae regula]."¹⁹⁶ Finally, there is Letter 109, which one manuscript entitles, *Heremitica regula*, and which Blum notes makes an internal reference to the "rule of the eremitic life." This letter in particular, however, is much less of the nature of a proper rule and more of an account of some

Damian "rejected the liberal arts as useless" (*God and Reason in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2001], 53), whereas in *De divina* the cardinal roundly castigates his opponents for having "acquired so little skill in the rudiments of learning or of the liberal arts" (Peter Damian, "On Divine Omnipotence," Wippel & Wolter 151). The liberal arts can hardly be useless if he finds fault in others for neglecting them! At any rate, Blum considers the *Liber gratissimus*, not these two more infamous works, as "perhaps the most influential of all his writings" (St. Peter Damian 21). It is translated as Letter 40 in Blum, *Letters 2*, 111-214.

¹⁹² Blum, *St. Peter Damian* 12.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* See Peter Damian, Letter 18, in Blum, trans., *The Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 1: Letters 1-30* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1989), 159-70.

¹⁹⁴ Blum, *Letters 1*, 165; *PL* 145.332C.

¹⁹⁵ Blum, *Letters 2*, 289-334.

¹⁹⁶ Blum, *Letters 2*, 289; *PL* 145.335C.

exceptional ascetics, for which reason it is more commonly designated *Vita Rodulphi et Dominici Loricati*.¹⁹⁷ To summarize then, while he did not author a Rule on the order of St. Benedict's own, there is more than adequate evidence among St. Peter Damian's writings to consider him a monastic law-giver worthy of comparison with Vergil's Saturn in *Aen.* 8.321-2. Whether or not Dante had seen any of those letters, the important thing for our purposes is Peter's *reputation* as a monastic legislator.

Moving on to Damian's other writings, and leaving at least a glimmer of a possibility for Dante's knowledge of them, the opening stanza of the Hymn for St. Benedict at Lauds refers to the monastic patriarch ascending "the palace of heaven," in an apparent anticipation of Beatrice's reference to ascending "the steps of the eternal palace" in *Par.* 21.8.¹⁹⁸ Damian addresses the theme of contemplative ascent and its relation to the active descent toward others in a felicitous formula from Letter 82:

For if they are now engaged in the contemplation of the highest truth, they may still be compassionately involved in the needs of their weak brothers, because charity will wondrously scale the heights when it reaches down in mercy to the lowly needs of our neighbor; and the more benevolently it belittles itself in unpretentious tasks, the stronger will it be when returning to the highest good. (Letter 82.11)¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, we can see resonances of the Golden Age myth throughout Damian's *oeuvre*. Thus, he refers to the age of St. Romuald in familiar Saturnine terms: "O golden age of Romuald...! A golden age, I say, in which so many citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem lived in the midst of the forest animals of the mountains and woods" (*VBR* 64).²⁰⁰ In the second stanza of the *Rithmus de Gaudio Paradisi*, Damian's remark that in Paradise "Chilling winter, burning summer, neither rages" forms a neat compliment to his own words in *Paradiso* about passing "easily through [the ascetic endurance of] heats and frosts, content

¹⁹⁷ Blum, *Letters* 2, 289, n. 4. The letter itself is found in Blum, *Letters* 4, 207-26.

¹⁹⁸ "Caeli scandit palatium," Peter Damian, *Hymnus* 76, *Ad laudes* (PL 145.938D). Compare "le scale de l'eterno palazzo più s'accende" (*Par.* 21.7-8).

¹⁹⁹ Blum, *Letters* 3, 240.

²⁰⁰ Peter Damian, "The Life of Blessed Romuald," Belisle, *Sources* 167. See the Latin text in Peter Damian, *Vita Beati Romualdi* 105-6.

in contemplative thoughts” during his life on earth (*Par.* 21.116-7).²⁰¹ The Vergilian beatitude of the eighteenth stanza, “Blest the soul that... / ...beneath her sees revolving the concentric orbs in space [Felix...quae...anima / ...sub se despectat altam orbis volvi machinam],” seems to anticipate Dante the pilgrim’s vista in retrospect at the end of *Par.* 22.²⁰² The dictum of the fourteenth stanza, l. 3, “Thus the common good combineth what in each was separate,” not only summarizes Dante’s general principles about merit and charity in Paradise, but also recalls the primitive communism of the Golden Age.²⁰³ Similarly, Damian implicitly attacks the idea of private ownership in Letter 142.14, “To his Hermits in the Monastery of St. Barnabas in Gamugno,” referring to material possessions as “common goods...held in trust,” and enjoining that one should distribute them to the poor, “not as their owner, but as an agent, and not merely through motives of charity, but of justice.”²⁰⁴ Finally, there is the theme of decline from golden beginnings—so prominent in Damian’s third speech about the cloister which has “become so barren,” the passing of the cardinal’s hat “from bad to worse,” and the “lean and barefoot” apostles contrasted with the “heavy [gravi]” modern bishops (*Par.* 21.118-9, 125-6, 127-32). This speech has its antecedent in the lament “into what lack of zeal our holy order has fallen, and does not cease to fall more deeply every day” in Damian’s *Letter* 153.3, as well as numerous other passages in his work including the significant comparison between ruined buildings of stone and the decay of the “monastic order” in his “Rule,” Letter 18.1-3 (cf. St. Benedict’s speech on the ruined abbeys in *Par.* 22.76-8).²⁰⁵ But also the self-

²⁰¹ “Hiem horrens, aestas torrens illic nunquam saeviunt,” Peter Damian, *Rithmus de Gaudio Paradisi* 5.1 (Peter Damian, *Song* 10, 11); “lievemente passava caldi e geli, / contento ne’ pensier contemplativi” (*Par.* 21.116-7).

²⁰² Compare *Georgics* 2.490. On Vergil’s use of *felix*, see J.S. Clay, “The Argument at the End of Vergil’s Second Georgic,” *Philologus* 120 (1976), 239-40.

²⁰³ “Proprium sic singulorum commune fit omnium” (Damian, *Rithmus* 14.3; *Song* 14, 15). See also, for example, Damian’s Letter 74.2, in Blum, *Letters* 3, 151-2.

²⁰⁴ Blum, trans., *The Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 5: Letters 121-150* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 2004), 132; *PL* 144.425C. Mackin notes the striking statement further on: “Where, he who takes from the rich to give to the poor is not to be thought a thief, but a dispenser of common property” (Blum *Letters* 5, 133, qtd. in Mackin 121; *PL* 144.425C-426A). Thus Mackin is quite correct to observe, “St. Peter Damian demonstrates that contemplation is far more than just solitary meditation. It is a means to serve the common good and to rectify the injustices that follow excessive accumulation of wealth” (121).

²⁰⁵ Peter Damian, “The Thirteenth Treatise of St. Peter Damian: On the Perfection of Monks,” McNulty 82; in Blum’s translation, it is *The Letters of Peter Damian, Vol. 6: Letters 151-180* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 2005), 15. The passage from Letter 18 is in Blum, *Letters* 1, 159-60. In Letter 137 Damian quotes Horace, *Odes* 3.6.46, to emphasize the theme of decline in terms reminiscent of the decline of the Golden Age in

divestment of the “lean and barefoot” St. Peter becomes the hallmark of the followers of St. Benedict in Damian’s “Homily in Praise and Honor of St. Benedict, Abbot and Confessor.”²⁰⁶ Thus we see that in his depiction of the eremitical life, his depiction of Paradise, his understanding of monastic property, and his comparison of monastic and ecclesiastical beginnings with latter-day decline, St. Peter Damian repeatedly alludes to the myth of the Golden Age in ways that directly parallel the invocations of that myth in *Par.* 21.

Perhaps the most striking of Damian’s works for a reader of *Par.* 21-22 is his Letter 28 “To Leo the hermit,” commonly entitled *Dominus vobiscum*.²⁰⁷ The chapter comprising paragraphs 45-55 in particular, “Laus eremiticae vitae [In praise of the eremitic life],” circulated as a discrete pamphlet in its own right and constitutes a full lyrical encomium of the contemplative lives of monastic hermits. Even the skeptical Nicolangelo D’Acunto acknowledges, “It is not unlikely that it was precisely the reading of this widely distributed text that allowed Dante to choose Peter Damian as a champion of the hermitic and contemplative life....”²⁰⁸ As a good rhetorician, Damian varies the terms of address he uses for the subject of the *Laus*, now referring to *solitaria vita*, now to *eremus*, and now to *vita eremitica*. But often enough, he addresses that subject in both the second and third person as *cella*, “the cell,” *i.e.* the space in which the monk deliberately confines himself.²⁰⁹ Paradoxically, for Damian the static space of the cell becomes the locus of the celestial pilgrim’s *entire* tripartite journey: “a paradise of delights, where like various savory spices or the perfume or red-glowing flowers the fragrant scents of virtue give forth their odor;”

Hesiod: “Our fathers’ age, worse than our grandfathers’, gave birth to us, an inferior breed, who will in due course produce still more degenerate offspring” (Horace 164). See Blum, *Letters* 5, 94.

²⁰⁶ McNulty 159-66.

²⁰⁷ Found in Belisle, *Sources* 177-21; McNulty 53-81; and Blum, *Letters* 1, 255-89.

²⁰⁸ D’Acunto 304.

²⁰⁹ A well-known saying of Abba Moses the Ethiopian reads: “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything” (Moses 6; Ward 139). Individual cells had been largely replaced by St. Benedict’s time and throughout the Carolingian era by common dormitories, but by St. Peter Damian’s time the cell had been revived in Western monasticism by such figures as Damian’s own saintly subject, Romuald of Ravenna. On the first shift, see Vogüé, “Coment” 39-57, and Hasbrouck. On the general significance of the cell in early monasticism, see Stelios Ramfos, *Like a Pelican in the Wilderness: Reflections on the Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, M.A.: Holy Cross, 2000), 25-39.

the purgatorial “Chaldean furnace,”²¹⁰ and the infernal “dwelling-place” where evil spirits are encountered.²¹¹ But, strikingly, the hermit’s cell is also “the Jacob’s ladder [scala] that leads men to heaven and brings down to us the assistance of angels” and “the golden way [aurea via]” (*Dom. vob.* 49).²¹² Vitarelli notes that Dante might have taken the image of the ladder from many sources, but the detail of its gold color is unique and may thus have been suggested by the close proximity of these epithets in Damian’s letter.²¹³ Finally, one can’t help but think that Dante the pilgrim, as he contemplates the stars from just beyond the contemplative space of Saturn’s sphere, consciously imitates Damian’s “brother in his cell” who “watches [contemplatur] the course of the stars in the heavens as the course of the psalms proceeds from his lips....He performs his service [officium], and the star carries out its assigned function: he by his chanting reaches out in spirit toward the inaccessible light; the star in constant succession to its neighbor restores for his sight the light of day” (*Dom. vob.* 50).²¹⁴ Given Saturn’s association with the eremitic life, contemplation, and astrology, the author of these pensive

²¹⁰ The fiery furnace is not the only purgatorial image Peter Damian employs for the hermit’s cell. Belisle observes that the kiln, the workshop, and the “bath which cleanses, purifies, and shines” round out the picture. (“Solitude” 135)

²¹¹ Blum, *Letters 1*, 281, 287; Belisle, *Sources* 203, 209. On this point see also Belisle, “Golden Solitude,” Belisle, *Privilege* 136. The identification of the cell with hell admittedly lies on shakier ground than the identification with paradise and purgatory. Damian writes, “O eremus terribile malignis spiritibus habitaculum! ubi cellae monachorum, velut tentoria ordinate castrorum...” (*PL* 145.250C). Belisle translates this as, “O hermitage, frightening dwelling-place of evil spirits, where monks’ cells rise like tents in a field...” (*Sources* 209). But this seems to treat *malignis spiritibus* as genitive, whereas Blum’s rendering avoids that problem: “O hermitage, a dwelling awesome to evil spirits, where the cells of monks are raised like rows of tents in a camp...” (Blum, *Letters 1*, 287). The subordinate phrase *ubi cellae* suggests the image of *eremus* as a desert plain that monks share with their enemy, but it certainly seems as though *terribile habitaculum* is intended as a description of the *eremus* as a whole, and that the effect on evil spirits is due not to the cells merely.

That said, the idea of the desert as a dwelling-place of evil spirits invaded by the monks is an old and common *topos*. When St. Anthony withdraws further into the desert, the demons say to him, “Why have you moved into our home? What have you got to do with the desert [deserto]? Leave other people’s property alone” (*Vita Antonii* 13 [12]; *PL* 73.133D; Carolinne White, trans. & ed., *Early Christian Lives* [London: Penguin, 1998], 17-8). This conception of the desert itself as demonic territory lies behind St. Benedict’s statement that hermits are trained to “fight against the Devil” in “single combat in the desert [heremi]” (*RB* 1.4-5 [17]).

²¹² Blum, *Letters 1*, 283.

²¹³ Vitarelli 2, 74-6.

²¹⁴ Blum, *Letters 1*, 284; *PL* 145.248C-D. Varro uses a verse from an unknown play to connect seeing itself, *video*, with keeping awake, *vigilium* (a basic monastic practice), in order to watch the stars: “Visenda vigilant, vigilium invident” (*De lingua* 6.80).

reflections surely finds himself at home in Saturn's sphere, just as Dante the pilgrim reproduces there the contemplative experience that Damian describes.

Just as the words of the historical St. Peter Damian echo with the associations of Saturn, so do the words of Dante's literary figure in Saturn's sphere. Damian begins by noting his own descent down "the steps of the sacred ladder" of contemplation to speak to Dante, interrupting his silent contemplative practice to give Saturn's laws to the pilgrim for the sake of active love (*Par.* 21.64-6). Damian prescribes "severe limits" to the pilgrim's questions about divine providence, a reflection of Saturn's confinement and restriction, and a correction of astrological practice by reference to "high charity" (*Par.* 21.70), while simultaneously recalling the *Commedia's* two invocations of Saturn (*Inf.* 14.96, *Par.* 21.26-7) with the reference to "the counsel which governs the world..." (*Par.* 21.70-1).²¹⁵ Saturn's association not just with law and rulers but with enslaved persons illuminates Damian's reference to the contemplatives' service of God. The hermit-cardinal substitutes "the derogatory form *serva* for the more neutral *servo*" in *Par.* 21.70, suggesting the self-degradation of the monastic life, equated in thirteenth-century canon law with the slaves (*servi*) of Justinian's legal code.²¹⁶ The second speech starts with Damian's explicit

²¹⁵ The expression "severe limits" is that of Gardner, who otherwise puts this aspect of Saturn in exceedingly positive terms when he writes that "one of the good influences of Saturn is to give the dispositions necessary to exercise the virtue of discretion" (155). Tambling's references to Saturnine restriction are much more melancholic ("Saturn" 635, 642). For more on this motif in *Par.* 21-22, see Kay 226. On the correction of astrology in this speech see Mazzotta, *Vision* 161-2. Obviously, Damian's silence on this question fits with the cantos' general atmosphere of monastic silence, but Minguzzi also notes it as an instance of the Saturnine association with secrets (224).

²¹⁶ Kay 228. In an article on the medieval application of Justinian to monasticism, Paulin M. Blecker notes that strictly speaking, for the canonists the status of *servus* applied only to cenobitic monks, since only they lived under legal servitude without any personal property. But the consequent claim that the cenobitic life was stricter invites the same response that Blecker gives to Johannes Teutonicus's gloss to *Non dicatis*—if we take it literally it assumes that the cenobites were "poverty stricken," which was notoriously untrue. Thus the distinction at best can be only a legal technicality or fiction, and the comments of the canonists might even be taken to be somewhat ironic (Paulin M. Blecker, "The Civil Rights of the Monks in Roman and Canon Law: The Monks as *Servus*," *ABR* 17.2 [1966], 193-94). It should also be kept in mind that while the equation of cenobitic monks with Justinian's *servi* was believed to entail a certain *capitis diminutio*, insofar as it also allowed monks a certain degree of control over property it also allowed for abuse of the spirit of St. Benedict's regulations on the "most wicked vice [nequissimo vitio]" of private property (*RB* 33.7; 122, 123). In the end Blecker acknowledges that "the medieval lawyer's view of the monk as *servus* was something far different from the patristic conception of the monk as servant" (197). By contrast, Damian's speech throughout *Par.* 21 testifies eloquently to the *de facto* servitude of the hermits to God, and for the Camaldolese tradition even the hermits are subject to St. Benedict's *Rule*—including ultimately obedience to an abbot and divestment of property—properly adapted to their state, and so "most more fully observe obedience" (Rudolf, *Regula* 40; Belisle, *Sources* 253). In fact, Leyser insists that "obedience in the eremitical life" was an aspect of Romuald's legacy with fundamental importance for the new eremitical movement of 1000-1150

acknowledgement of contemplative experience: “the virtue of which [divine light], conjoined with my vision, lifts me above myself so far that I see the Supreme Essence from which it is drawn” (*Par.* 21.85-7).²¹⁷ In Mackin’s words, “This is an apt description of contemplation,” and the theme continues throughout the speech with references to “my vision,” being “fixed on God,” the illumination of the mind, “thinking” phrased in visual terms as *riguardare*, and being lifted up to heaven.²¹⁸ Here Damian first tells the pilgrim that none can “satisfy” his request—a possible allusion to Cicero’s etymology of Saturnus (*Par.* 21.93).²¹⁹ Damian then cites as the reason for this the deep “abyss of the eternal statute” (l. 94) recalling St. Bernard’s discussion of contemplating “the abyss of divine judgments” associated with the angelic thrones (*De consid.* 5.14).

Under the restrictions imposed by Damian, Dante finally asks the question of his identity, and the focus in the third speech (*Par.* 21.106-135) on “the geographical space and terrain” of the contemplative hermit’s life reflects Saturn’s association with the element of earth.²²⁰ The rising of the Apennine crags (*Par.* 21.106) parallels the great heights of Saturn/astrology and of the upward climb of the Saturnine ladder toward the contemplatives’ spiritual goal, and the reference to “thunders [troni]” in l. 108 forms a neat pun on the “Thrones [Troni]” assigned to Saturn’s sphere.²²¹ Damian’s “contentment” with a simple, natural diet hearkens back to the myth of the Golden Age (cf. *Pur.* 22.148-50), explicitly associated with the beginnings of Camaldolese monasticism in his *Vita Beati Romualdi* 64.²²² The hermit’s passage to

(32). Furthermore, in contrast to the traditional cenobitic foundations, “total renunciation of secular concerns” (to quote the customs of Oigny) was one of the basic concerns of the new hermits (Leyser 21).

²¹⁷ “la cui virtù, col mio veder congiunta, / mi leva sopra me tanto, ch’i’ veggio / la somma essenza de la quale è munta” (*Par.* 21.85-7).

²¹⁸ Mackin 113; *Par.* 21.89, 92, 100-2.

²¹⁹ “a la dimanda tua non satisfara” (*Par.* 21.93). Cf. Cicero *De natura deorum* 2.64: “Saturnus...est appellatus quod saturaretur annis” (qtd. in Robert Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* [Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 2006], 546). Maltby cites similar etymologies in St. Augustine (“tanquam satur esset”) and Fulgentius (“a saturando Saturnus dictus est”) (547).

²²⁰ Mazzotta, “Contemplazione” 201. Damian’s reference to the consecration to worship of the Avellanese hermitage also alludes to Varro’s etymological connection between *templum* and *contemplārī* (cf. Mazzotta, “Contemplazione” 204).

²²¹ Güntert 334.

²²² Belisle, *Sources* 167. Carlo Delcorno suggests that *Par.* 21.113-17 owes a debt to St. Jerome’s *Vita Hilarionis*. Although he compares the free Italian translation by Domenico Cavalca as well as the Latin, he says nothing of his opinion whether Dante would have known an early version of that translation. See Carlo Delcorno, “Le *Vitae*

“contemplative thoughts” by means of fasting befits the simplicity of the Golden Age and echoes the original desert understanding of the active life as ascetic preparation for the contemplative life.²²³ But also, the specific phrase Damian uses, *pensier contemplativi*, unites contemplation directly with the weight (*peso*) associated with Saturn.²²⁴ He refers to Fonte Avellana both as “hermitage [ermo]” and as “cloister [chiostro],” emphasizing both its solitude and its function as an enclosure or place of confinement (*Par.* 21.110, 118). The description of the “cloister” as yielding an “abundant harvest” (*Par.* 21.119), recalls Vergil’s apostrophe to *Saturnia tellus* as “mighty mother of fruits” and “mighty mother of men.”²²⁵ Lastly, the invective against the “modern pastors” begins with a reference to Damian’s own old age when he was made a cardinal, and the original fertility of Fonte Avellana (*Par.* 21.118-9)²²⁶ coupled with the invocation of Saints Peter’s and Paul’s “lean and barefoot” simplicity in the early Church (*Par.* 21.127-9) points toward the theme of Golden Age beginnings followed by subsequent decline, while also associating the former with Saturnine poverty.²²⁷ All three of St. Peter Damian’s speeches to the pilgrim in *Par.* 21 are thus replete with reference to aspects of Saturn’s lore and associations.

While Dante may have supposed wrongly that the epitaph that lies behind *Par.* 21.121-3 was that of Damian, the real St. Peter Damian composed his own rather Saturnine epitaph on the themes of *memento mori* and *contemptus mundi*, wherein his “spirit ascends on high, goes back to its source.”²²⁸

Patrum nella letteratura religiosa medievale (secc.XIII-XV),” *Lettere Italiane* 43.2 (1991), 187-8. Nevertheless, the generally accepted date for the completed translation is between 1326-1333, after Dante’s death, and I have seen no evidence showing that Dante would have known an earlier version (Manu Radhakrishnan, “Egyptian Hermit and Italian Laity,” *Aevum* 92.2 [2018], 314-5).

²²³ Cf. Cassian: “For we shall never be able to spurn the pleasures of eating here and now if our mind is not fixed on divine contemplation and if it does not take delight, instead, in the love of virtue and the beauty of heavenly things” (*Inst.* 5.14.4; 125). Florence Russo also makes the connection between St. Peter Damian’s austere way of life and the life of the Golden Age (60).

²²⁴ Forms of this word are used a total of six times in these two cantos. One possible source of the association between Saturn and weight or weighing is in Varro’s discussion of *pendēre*, for “the temple of Saturn...even now has a pair of scales set up ready for weighing [*pensuram*] purposes” (*De lingua.* 5.36.183; Varro 170, 171).

²²⁵ Vergil, *Georg.* 2.173-4 (82).

²²⁶ Kay points out Damian’s use of an agricultural metaphor in these lines as a nod toward Saturn’s agricultural significance (225).

²²⁷ Kay notes that the reference to the pastors’ covering with a “hide” (*Par.* 21.134) alludes to the tradition that one of Saturn’s occupations is making garments out of hides (238).

²²⁸ *Epitaphium*, l. 11 (*PL* 145.968D). The translation is that of Peter-Damian Belisle in *Vigilucci* 65. On the epitaph that Dante almost certainly knew, that of Peter degli Onesti on his tomb at Santa Maria in Porto (“the House of Our

While God is obviously the ultimate source, the sphere of Saturn acts here as a more proximate one. We have seen how St. Peter Damian, in his life, his writings, and his speeches to Dante the pilgrim in Canto 21, exemplifies the traits of solitude, contemplation, asceticism, law-giving, judgment, etc. associated with the astrology, mythology, and philosophy of Saturn. In this respect, Damian in turn mediates the eremitic life in ways that are directly relevant to Dante's own concerns. But he is a preparatory figure. It still remains to consider the more fully Saturnine person of St. Benedict in Canto 22.

Lady on the Adriatic shore," *Par.* 21.122-3), see Michele Barbi, "Pier Damiano e Pietro Peccatore," *Con Dante e coi suoi interpreti: Saggi per un nuovo commento della Divina Commedia* (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1941-49), 260. Barbi's magisterial essay solidly confirms what Singleton calls "the more plausible interpretation" of the tercet in question (*Par.* II, 21.121-3). Kay is therefore mistaken when he argues that the famously disputed lines about Peter Damian and "Peter the Sinner" are intended to dispel a false rumor that the tomb of Peter degli Onesti was that of Damian, thus suggesting Saturn's association with false rumors (Kay 234-5),

5.

“the greatest and most shining of those pearls”

St. Benedict of Nursia

Manilius tells us that Saturn “wields as a father power over the fortunes of fathers and the plight of the old.”²²⁹ Thus, the ultimate face of Saturn in the *Commedia* is, appropriately, more ancient than St. Peter Damian by half a millennium. Damian sings of St. Benedict of Nursia (modern Norcia) in his famous hymn, “*Gemma coelestis*,” as “conquering age,” an image that would seem to paint the great ruler-giver as already ancient in his own lifetime (Vespers hymn, 11 July).²³⁰ St. Gregory the Great had already described him as a *puer senex*, having “the heart of an elder” even as a boy (*Dial.* II.Prol.2).²³¹ Indeed, it is striking to compare traditional depictions of Benedict the father of monks with his long white beard, black robe, and abbatial staff with the later depictions of Father Time with the same beard, black robe, and farmer’s scythe. The parallels, however, are not merely superficial. For instance, the word “father” is only used three times in the two cantos: once in the pilgrim’s address to St. Benedict (l. 58), once of the sun as “father” of all mortals (l. 116), and once of Saturn (l. 146). Furthermore, of the four individual souls indicated in this sphere, only St. Benedict, like Saturn himself, is not properly named. I will suggest

²²⁹ Manilius, *Astr.* 2.34-5.

²³⁰ *Breviarium Monasticum, Pars Aestiva*, third ed. (Mechelen: H. Dessain, 1939), 534. See also *PL* 145.957D.

²³¹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* II.Prol.2 (Kardong, *Life* 1). On the second *Dialogue* (hereafter *Dial.* II), see McCann 194-200, Vogüé, *St. Benedict* 3-40, Michaela Puzicha, “The Second Book of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great,” *ABR* 65.2 (2014), 126-34, and the commentaries by Vogüé in *The Life of Saint Benedict*, trans. Hilary Costello & Eoin de Bhaldraithe (Petersham, M.A.: St. Bede’s 1993) and Kardong in his *Life of St. Benedict*. St. Gregory’s authorship of the *Dialogues* has been questioned, but see Vogüé’s rebuttal of the major scholar on this issue, Francis Clark: “Is Gregory the Great the Author of the *Dialogues*?” *ABR* 56.3 (2005), 309-14. The standard critical edition of the *Dialogues* is that of Vogüé for the Sources Chrétiennes series, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 3 vols., ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, Sources Chrétiennes 251, 260, & 265 (Paris: Cerf, 1978-80). *Dialogue* II is found with Vogüé’s French translation in volume 2, 120-249.

Palladius ascribed the same epithet to St. Macarius the Egyptian in *Lausiac History* 17.2, where the Latin translation in *VP* 8.19 reads: “...vocaretur παιδαριωγέρον, id est, in puerile aetate senex...” (*PL* 73.1109C). Cf. Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. & ann. Robert T. Meyer (N.Y.: Paulist, 1964), 54.

in fact that a close consideration of *Par.* 22 reveals St. Benedict as the ultimate *Saturnus redemptus*, the pagan god of the literary and astrological imagination become Christian flesh.²³²

Certainly, the sole witness to St. Benedict's life—the second of the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great—prominently underscores his life of three years as an ascetic hermit in the cave at Subiaco (*Dial.* II, 1.3-8). Indeed, it is during these years of solitude and not during his later active era that Gregory says God wished “to show the life of Benedict as an example to the world” (*Dial.* II.1.6).²³³ Perhaps more importantly, the Middle Ages in general associate him quite closely with the eremitic life, as when St. Peter Damian writes, “Of this, moreover, we are certain: that blessed Benedict was a man devoted to life as a hermit, and that he undoubtedly wanted us to be what he was” (Letter 152.10).²³⁴ Thus, Benedict begins his monastic struggle in what St. Gregory calls “a narrow cave [arctissimum specum],” a phrase that highlights his asceticism by reference to Saturnine restriction (*Dial.* II.1.4).²³⁵ Additionally, one of Saturn's occupations is making garments out of hides, and Gregory tells us that St. Benedict wore animal skins (*Dial.* II.1.8).²³⁶ The devil tempts him in the form of a *merola*, or black bird (all of which belong to

²³² On St. Benedict, though he makes the now generally discredited arguments that Benedict was a priest operating under papal direction to subject Italian monasticism to a single rule, see Ildephonse Schuster, *Saint Benedict and His Times*, trans. Gregory J. Roettger (St. Louis, M.O.: Herder, 1953), as well as John Chapman, *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century* (London, 1929), Justin McCann, *Saint Benedict: The Story of the Man and His Work*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1958), Leonard von Matt and Stephan Hilpisch, *Saint Benedict*, trans. Ernest Graf (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), and Adalbert de Vogüé, *St. Benedict: The Man and His Work*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (Petersham, M.A.: St. Bede's, 2006).

²³³ John Howe has demonstrated that it was this image of St. Benedict the hermit that remained the primary influence on medieval monasticism in Italy, a role it continued with the rise of the mendicant orders, “St. Benedict the Hermit as a Model for Italian Sanctity: Some Hagiographical Witnesses,” *ABR* 55.1 (2004), 42-53. Eric John notes the priority already in St. Gregory's time of the Saint who authored the *Rule* over the *Rule* itself: “For Gregory it was Benedict himself, not his *Rule*, who was the model for monks...” (“*Secularium Prioratus* and the Rule of St. Benedict,” *Revue Bénédictine* 75 [1965], 214).

²³⁴ Blum, *Letters* 6, 11-12 (the last phrase is an allusion to I Cor. 7:7). In his *De vita solitaria* 2.3.9 (1346-56), Petrarch praises St. Benedict as an exemplary hermit and an inspirer of hermits and eremitic orders: “It is enough for me to confer dignity upon our solitudes by the mere mention of so great an inhabitant and to strengthen my present argument with such a witness. It is long to enumerate, moreover, who were the men and of what sort who followed in his footsteps, the founders of venerable orders who, provoked by the fame of their leader and the stimulus of his example...sought out various places of solitude. As a sign there still exist sacred convents and devout churches amid the forest caverns,—Cistercium [Citeaux], Maiella, Carthusia [Chartreuse], Vallombrosa, Camaldole [Camaldoli], and numberless others” (Francis Petrarch, *The Life of Solitude*, trans. Jacob Zeitlin [Champaigne, I.L.: U of Illinois, 1924], 217). On this whole subject, see Howe, “St. Benedict the Hermit,” cited above.

²³⁵ Kardong, *Life* 7.

²³⁶ See Kay 238.

Saturn), an omen of death in Vergil described by St. Isidore as a solitary species (*Dial.* II.2.1; *Aen.* 12.862; *Etym.* 12.7.69). Like Saturn, Benedict gives laws in the form of life according to a rule (*regularis vitae*) to some unruly monks, but Gregory says that the effort to meditate on new things and emulate the ascetic practice of the old man is a “heavy burden” to them, they try to murder him, and eventually he returns “to his beloved place of solitude, where he lived alone with himself but under the gaze of the Heavenly Spectator” (*Dial.* II.3.3, 5).²³⁷ The scenario of being overthrown as abbot of the monastery and the subsequent flight into solitude recall the usurpation of Saturn at the end of the Golden Age, while at the same time constituting St. Benedict as *Saturnus redemptus* by making the episode demonstrative of the abbot’s wonderworking power and virtue. In explaining the meaning of the phrase *habitavit secum*, St. Gregory emphasizes “the contemplative heights” which St. Benedict reaches: “Therefore, venerable Benedict dwelt with himself in a mental cloister. For every time the ardor of contemplation wrapt him on high, he left himself behind. Of that there is no doubt” (*Dial.* II.3.9).²³⁸ Altogether, St. Benedict’s character as hermit and contemplative, that is a virtuous Saturnine, emerges clearly from the account of his life by St. Gregory the Great.

Aside from his efforts to guide other monks, originally a failure but later quite successful, the most “active” phase of Benedict’s life comes with the settlement at Monte Cassino and the evangelization of the pagan *rustici* there, who are uncultivated like the meaner type of Saturnine (*Dial.* II.8.10-12).²³⁹ Again, compare the “unschooled men...from the hills” brought together and taught laws by Saturn in Vergil, *Aen.* 8.21-2. Yet even while this evangelistic episode reveals St. Benedict’s active concern for the people around him, his destruction of the mountain’s idol in St. Gregory’s account results in a diabolical attack on the saint, underscoring his qualifications as a hermit who has “learned...to fight against the

²³⁷ Kardong, *Life* 21-22.

²³⁸ Kardong, *Life* 23.

²³⁹ *Codice cassinese*, comm. *Par.* 21.15: “Sub infusione saturni due species hominum cadunt una quarum grossa est et inculta puta illorum qui grosse nigre et inculte capillature sunt dicentes.”

Devil” in “single combat” (*RB* 1.4, 5).²⁴⁰ Benedict’s warm paternity toward his monks emerges clearly throughout, particularly in his relationship with the young oblates, Maurus and Placidus. For instance, when St. Benedict becomes aware through clairvoyance of the boy Placid beginning to drown in the lake, the episode might be read as a reversal/redemption of the mythological figure of Saturn, who cannot hear his infant son’s cries due to a simple din (*Gregory, Dial.* II.7.1).²⁴¹ In this way, St. Benedict’s “active” life appears just as Saturnine as his “contemplative” life.

But perhaps the most important part of St. Benedict’s life *vis-à-vis* Canto 22 of *Paradiso* is his profound contemplative vision in *Dial.* II.35, which we have already considered in connection with the pilgrim’s own vista in *Par.* 22.133-54:

With my sight I returned through all and each of the seven spheres, and saw this globe
such that I smiled at its paltry semblance; and that counsel I approve as best which holds it for
least, and he whose thought is turned elsewhere may be called truly upright.

...

And all the seven were displayed to me, how great they are and swift, and how distant each from
other in location. The little threshing-floor which makes us so fierce was all revealed to me from
hills to river-mouths, as I circled with the eternal Twins.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ See Kardong, *Life* 12, and compare *Legenda aurea* 49 (Jacobus 189). Jean Seznec seems to have added the detail, picked up on by Jeremy Tambling, that the devil’s appearance to the saint was black (Seznec 48; Tambling 634). I find this neither in *Dial.* II nor in the *Legenda aurea*.

²⁴¹ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 4.195-210. Clearly, the redemptive character of the later Christian story *vis-à-vis* the older pagan one is heightened still more by the fact that Saturn intended to eat his son, whereas St. Benedict’s intentions are of course entirely paternal and charitable.

²⁴² Col viso ritornai per tutte quante
le sette spere, e vidi questo globo
tal, ch’io sorrisi del suo vil sembiante;
e quell consiglio per migliore approbo
che l’ha per meno; e chi ad altro pensa
chiamar si puote veramente probo.

...

e tutti e sette mi si dimostraro
quanto son grandi e quanto son veloci
e come sono in distante riparo.

The background of St. Benedict's own experience of contemplation of the world, not directly referenced in *Paradiso* but alluded to by the pilgrim's view, establishes St. Benedict as one who has already on earth attained the ultimate heights of contemplation and thus a unique authority. Indeed, St. Bernard understands this to have been a vision of God "face to face," making it generally unrivalled in the Western tradition despite such literary analogues as *De Somnium Scipionis*, none of which involve an incontrovertible *visio Dei*.²⁴³ In St. Gregory's words, Benedict's mind has become so expanded in God "that it becomes greater than the world [superior existat mundo]" (*Dial.* II.35.6, l. 55). Recalling this experience when we meet St. Benedict in *Par.* 22 reminds us not only of the paradox of his simultaneous regard and *contemptus* for the world, but of his own deified status as one who has contemplated God directly.²⁴⁴ It also recalls the contemplative link between Saturn and Astronomy (Dante, *Conv.* 2.13.28-30). Odo Casel seems to have been the first to note that when Gregory tells us St. Benedict stood at the window of a tower to "watch in prayer before the time for the Night Office" (*Dial.* II.35.2), this means that at a physical level he is watching the stars from a functional observatory when the vision occurs.²⁴⁵ In turn, Pierre Courcelle has demonstrated that the account of the vision was fundamentally shaped by the astronomical context of Macrobius's *In Somnium Scipionis*, with the two demonstrating multiple verbal parallels.²⁴⁶ So for instance, the apparently unnecessary detail that St. Benedict's tower had a "stairway

L'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci,
volgondom' io con li eterni Gemelli,
tutta m'apparve da' colli a le foci;... (*Par.* 22.133-8, 148-53)

²⁴³ See St. Bernard, *Sermones de diversis*. 9.1 (*PL* 183.565D). Even Cuthbert Butler, normally quite Augustinian and Scholastic in his opinions on contemplation, allows that Bernard may well have understood St. Gregory's intention correctly and meant precisely what he said. See Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2003), 92. Cf. the discussion of the nature of St. Benedict's vision in Emmanuel Lanne, "L'interprétation palamite de la vision de Saint Benoît," *Le millénaire du mont Athos, 963-1963, Vol. 2* (1964), 21-47.

²⁴⁴ Between the prominent account of St. Benedict's eremitical existence, directly linked with contemplation in *Dial.* II.3.5-9, and the vision of divine light in *Dial.* II.35, Mackin's claims that "St. Benedict was not historically a contemplative," and that "only through [his] mentions of hermits and contemplatives can Benedict justify his presence in the sphere of Saturn" are truly baffling (110, 116-7).

²⁴⁵ Odo Casel, "Zur Vision des hl. Benedikts (*Vita* c. 35)," *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und seiner Zweige* 38 (1917), 345.

²⁴⁶ Pierre Courcelle, "La vision cosmique." Casel had originally noted the similarity to Cicero's *De Somnium Scipionis* (346). Th. Delforge developed this in a brief article building on Courcelle's "La postérité chrétienne du *Songe de Scipion*," *Revue des Études latines* 36 (1958), 205-234 (see Delforge, "*Songe de Scipion*"). This prompted Courcelle to pull out all the stops, develop the suggestions of Casel and Delforge, add new analogues (particularly to

[that] connected the lower with the upper part [superioribus continuabat ascensus]” (how else would one reach the top of a tower?), corresponds to Macrobius’s “dizzy heights of the complete ascension to the celestial realms [ad superna ascensionis]” (*In Somn.* 1.8.4). While St. Benedict does not literally ascend to the stars, as Scipio does in Cicero’s fiction, he does the verbal and spiritual equivalent. Astronomy and contemplation reveal their affinity, and even the pilgrim’s own journey through the spheres becomes an analogue of St. Benedict’s striking contemplative ascent.

Second, despite St. Gregory’s appropriate emphasis on St. Benedict the contemplative hermit, we must remember that his status as a legislator of monastic life partakes just as strongly of the Saturnine (recall *Aen.* 8.321-2).²⁴⁷ In fact, St. Benedict’s *Rule* anticipates this canto ruled by Saturn, while the canto in turn references the *Rule*.²⁴⁸ We are prepared for St. Benedict’s solemn entrance already at the outset of the *Par.* 22, for example, with an apparently little-recognized allusion to the *Rule*’s penultimate chapter.²⁴⁹ Endeavoring to reassure the pilgrim after he is shaken by the cry of the Saturnine souls at the

St. Benedict’s tower), and to show that it wasn’t simply a question of Cicero’s dialogue influencing St. Gregory directly, but of that dialogue as mediated by Macrobius (see esp. 110-14).

²⁴⁷ This feature of St. Benedict’s personality is embodied visually in the traditional depiction of the great abbot holding a copy of the Rule, as in the eighth-century fresco in the underground church of St. Hermes on the via Salaria Vetere. See Guy Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries: Notes for the History of the Monasteries and Convents at Rome from the V through the X Century* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1957), 153-4, 399. For a photograph of the fresco, see Matt & Hilpisch 141, illust. 125.

²⁴⁸ On the *Rule* of St. Benedict, see the brief introduction in Venarde vii-xxi and the extensive one in *RB1980*, 3-151. Vogüé provides an overview in *St. Benedict* 43-110. See also Ildephonse Schuster, *Historical Notes on St. Benedict’s “Rule for Monks,”* trans. Leonard J. Doyle (Hamden, C.T.: The Shoestring P, 1962), Vogüé, *A Critical Study of the Rule of Benedict, Vol. 1: An Overview*, trans. Colleen Maura McGrane (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2013), and Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary*, trans. John Baptist Hasbrouck (Kalamazoo, M.I.: Cistercian, 1983). The definitive critical edition of the *Rule* for English readers is *RB1980*. Both Venarde’s text and that of *RB1980* are based on the St. Gall MS (SG 914), thought to be the closest extant witness to St. Benedict’s autograph (*RB1980*, 155). As Venarde points out, however, since the eighth century scribes began “correcting” Benedict’s sixth-century Latin, producing a standard, “revised” text throughout the Middle Ages that would likely have been the one Dante was familiar with (249). Oxoniensis, Hatton 48 in the Bodleian, though the oldest extant MS, is a copy of the revised text (Justin McCann, trans. & ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict In English and Latin* [Fort Collins, C.O.: Roman Catholic Books, n.d.], xv).

²⁴⁹ Giacomo Poletto (1894) notes Dante’s quotation of Vul. Ps. 68:10 in the *Epistle to the Cardinals 5* (see *Dantis Alaghieri Epistolae: The Letters of Dante, Emended Text*, ed. Paget Toynbee [Oxford: The Clarendon P, 1920], 132). Daniele Mattalia (1960) quotes the *Convivio*’s reference to Aristotle’s definition of “zeal” as a passion “proper to the human soul” (*Conv.* 3.8.10; 167). Finally, Giuseppe Giacalone (1968) and Umberto Bosco & Giovanni Reggio refer to Aquinas’s *ST I-II*, q. 28, a. 4 on the subject of zeal. All of these adequately explain the passion Beatrice describes, but no commentator I have seen actually identifies the source of the expression itself, and none of the references they adduce include a qualification of *zelo* as *buon*. See comm. *Par.* 22.9, *Dartmouth*.

end of Canto 21, Beatrice reminds him that all that is done in heaven is holy and “comes of righteous zeal [*buon zelo*]” (*Par.* 22.9; 245). More than likely, the *buon zelo* to which Beatrice refers owes a good deal to the *zelus bonus* of *RB* 72 “that separates from vice and leads to God and eternal life,” for “Monks should practice this zeal with the most ardent love” (*RB* 72.1-3). This use of the expression to refer to an event of the previous canto further urges the connection with the dominant figure of *Par.* 22.

In general, the monastic virtues emphasized throughout St. Benedict’s *Rule* are themselves hallmarks of the contemplative life anticipated by Saturn’s qualities: stability by restriction,²⁵⁰ silence by unsociability,²⁵¹ study and *lectio divina* from love of the ancients and deep thought,²⁵² devotion to the worship of God by religiosity and love of rites and sacrifices,²⁵³ chastity by castration and aversion to women,²⁵⁴ manual labor by agriculture and industriousness,²⁵⁵ the renunciation of private property by the conditions of the Golden Age and the Saturnalia,²⁵⁶ and fasting also by the Golden Age as well as poverty,²⁵⁷ constitute not only “tools of good works,” as the title of *RB* 4 announces, but also the “tools of the spiritual craft” (*RB* 4.75). They are the ways and means to contemplation itself, fully at home in the sphere of the seventh planet, and all have parallels in the astrology and mythology of Saturn. To take just two initial examples, St. Benedict clearly alludes to stability (the spiritual practice of the Saturnine qualities of restriction and confinement) when he indicates to the pilgrim that his brother contemplatives

²⁵⁰ *RB* Pr.50; 4.78; 7.35-6; 58.9, 15, 17. Cuthbert Butler observes that the vow of stability in *RB* 58.17 has been generally seen as a distinctive contribution of St. Benedict to the Western monastic tradition while also acknowledging that it is not original to him (*Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule* [Cambridge: Speculum Historiale, 1961], 123, 123 n. 4). Schuster raises the interesting question of the possible influence on St. Benedict of Justinian’s monastic legislation in the *Novellae*, in which stability constitutes an overriding concern (Schuster, *St. Benedict* 223-24). Lest this be thought unlikely despite the emperor’s reconquest of Italy in Benedict’s lifetime, the influence of the *Novellae* has recently been traced as far afield as Gaza and Palestine of the mid-sixth century. See Daniel Neary, “The Image of Justinianic Orthopraxy in Eastern Monastic Literature,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 25.1 (2017), 127-38. Certainly, Dante could well be thinking of Justinian when he has St. Benedict refer to “my brethren who stayed their feet within the cloisters” (*Par.* 22.50).

²⁵¹ *RB* 4.51-54; 6; 7.56-61; 42; 52.2.

²⁵² *RB* Pr.9-11; 4.55; 8.3; 38; 42.3-7; 48.13-8; 49.4.

²⁵³ *RB* 16; 18.23-5; 19; 22.6; 43.3; 47; 50.

²⁵⁴ *RB* 4.4, 59, 64.

²⁵⁵ *RB* 4.37; 35; 48; 57; 66.6-7.

²⁵⁶ *RB* 33; 34; 55; 58.24-5; 59.3-6.

²⁵⁷ *RB* 4.13; 39.7-8; 49.5, 7.

“stayed their feet within the cloisters” (*Par.* 22.50-1).²⁵⁸ Furthermore, the general portrait of the cenobium as a life radically in common, where private property is considered a “vice” (*RB* 33.1) and “All things should be common to all” (*RB* 33.6), carries clear reminiscences of the Golden Age, when “Even to mark the land with private bounds / Was wrong....”²⁵⁹

But it will perhaps be more enlightening to consider the relationship to Canto 22 of the three central virtues emphasized by the *Rule* (in chs. 5-7): obedience, silence, and humility. First of all, in the opening lines of his Prologue, St. Benedict frames obedience, not as an impersonal conformity to the demands of power, but as a personal response to a paternal figure: “Listen carefully, my son, to the teachings of a master.... Gladly accept and effectively fulfill the admonition of a loving father...” (*RB* Pr.1.).²⁶⁰ In turn, Dante the pilgrim almost seems to be responding directly to these words when he speaks of “The affection you show in speaking with me,” and we see the same paternal relationship echoed in the pilgrim’s address to St. Benedict precisely as “father” (*Par.* 22.52-3, 58). Second, as Peter Hawkins notes, the pilgrim’s decision to wait for Saturn’s abbot to speak first reads as an observance of the precept in *RB* 6.6: “For it becomes a master to speak and teach and befits a disciple to be silent [*tacere*] and listen” (cf. *Par.* 22.25-7).²⁶¹ We have already seen in the initial examination of Dante’s Saturn how the silence of this

²⁵⁸ While these lines may seem incongruous following the name of the itinerant St. Romuald, two points should be noted. First, in Letter 18.21, St. Peter Damian himself refers to the cloister he had built at the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, so associating a cloister with hermits is not in itself incongruous (Blum, *Letters 1*, 169). Second, in the hermitages of Romuald and Damian the essential Benedictine vow of stability was professed—even the lay brothers promised “perseverantiam omnibus diebus vitae meae in hac heremo” (Blum, *St. Peter* 99). Finally, in what Blum calls an exposition of Letter 18, Letter 50, Damian observes that “the order of hermits has two divisions, of whom some live in cells [practicing stability] while others move about in the wilderness refusing to live in fixed abodes” (Blum, *Letters 2*, 293). The latter then, as hermits “no longer fresh in the fervor of monastic life but long tested in a monastery,” have moved behind the need to adhere to the letter of the Rule (*RB* 1.3). If they do not literally keep “their feet within the cloisters,” they most certainly “kept a steadfast heart” (*Par.* 22.50-1). That said, Damian considered such hermits, for whom he reserves the Benedictine term “anchorites,” “rare or nonexistent” by his own day (Blum, *Letters 2*, 293). On Damian’s scrupulosity about the terms involved, see Phyllis Jestice, “Peter Damian against the Reformers,” *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1995), 69-70.

²⁵⁹ Vergil, *Georg.* 1.126-7 (61).

²⁶⁰ Benedict 3.

²⁶¹ Benedict 43. See Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante’s Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford U, 1999), 235. *RB1980* identifies a remark from St. Augustine’s *Sermon* 211.5 as a possible source, the main parallel being *tacere et audire*, but Augustine’s point is situational, whereas *RB* states a general principle (*RB1980*, 90, n. 6.6; cf. *PL* 38.1057).

sphere follows St. Benedict's teaching on *taciturnitas* in *RB* 6; this relationship between the sphere's silence and that of the *RB* becomes clearer in Canto 22, as the pilgrim himself demonstrates Ambrose Wathen's definition of *taciturnitas* according to the *Rule*: "This interplay of silence, word heard and returned out of silence....the appropriate interchange between persons through silence and speech."²⁶² Finally, Wathen notes that in this silence we hear the truth of being, *humilitas* (*RB* 7), the root of which is *humus* (earth), the Saturnine element.²⁶³ Lastly, according to *RB* 7, the monk practices humility in his ascent of Jacob's ladder, and ladder, *Rule*, humility, and contemplation all converge on one image when St. Benedict sadly tells the pilgrim "no one now lifts his foot from earth to ascend it [my *Rule*]" (*Par.* 22.73-4). In this way the dialogic action of Saturn's sphere follows the teaching of St. Benedict's monastic *Rule*, just as Saints Romuald, Peter Damian, and Benedict himself did in life, since "the holy man could in no way teach other than he lived" (*Dial.* II.36.10-11).²⁶⁴ Dante the poet reveals himself in the pilgrim as the "unschooled" man who receives the laws of Saturn redeemed. By undergoing a sort of novitiate in the sphere of Saturn, he realizes a process of acclimation there.

Finally, St. Benedict's speeches to the pilgrim also invoke and embody multiple Saturnine qualities and associations.²⁶⁵ Accordingly, St. Benedict's first speech, *Par.* 22.31-51, alludes to

²⁶² Ambrose Wathen, "The Word of Silence: On Silence and Speech in *RB*," *Cistercian Studies* 17.3 (1982), 208. On the topic of silence in *RB*, see also his earlier *Silence: The Meaning of Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict* (Washington, D.C.: Cistercian, 1973).

²⁶³ Wathen 208.

²⁶⁴ Kardong, *Life* 139. On this comment of St. Gregory's, see Adalbert de Vogüé, "The Mention of the *Regula Monachorum* at the End of the Life of Benedict: Its Literary and Spiritual Function," trans. John-Baptist Hasbrouck *Cistercian Studies* 20 (1985), 3-13.

²⁶⁵ Note that where St. Peter Damian had waited for Dante the pilgrim to pose his questions before answering, St. Benedict demonstrates a clairvoyant gift for answering the pilgrim's questions without needing to hear them first. This is amply documented of the Saint himself in *Dialogues* II, but Dante Della Terza notes just two examples: the miracle of St. Benedict's knowledge of Placidus's danger in *Dial.* II.7.1 and the recognition of King Totila's attempt to test him in *Dial.* II.14 ("L'incontro con San Benedetto [*Paradiso* XXII]," *Strutture poetiche, esperienze letterarie: Percorsi culturali da Dante ai contemporanei* [Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1995], 71-2). I find the simple story of St. Benedict reading the proud thoughts of the knight's son in *Dial.* II.20 even more apropos (Kardong, *Life* 81). We need not think St. Peter Damian incapable of such clairvoyance to note the effect this has in *Paradiso* of increasing the saintly prestige of the old monastic patriarch in relation to his successor. Della Terza poses the question about the reason for this difference between the two speakers in Saturn's sphere. After delving into the background of St. Benedict's figure in St. Gregory's *Dial.* II, he concludes: "L'intuito divinatorio di Benedetto è una prerogativa storica del personaggio. Applicando tale prerogativa alla situazione e leggendo nella mente di Dante il proposito che questi cela egli è in grado di presentarci in veloce scorcio la crescita del processo di

contemplation directly when St. Benedict mentions Dante's thoughts, *concetti* in 22.33 and *al pensier, da che sì ti riguarde* in 22.36, and identifies the souls of Saturn as "contemplative men" in 22.46-7, where deep thought and eremitic life both recall qualities of Saturn. His identification of the hermits Macarius and Romuald justifies the interpretation of the commentator from St. Benedict's own monastery of Monte Cassino that "contemplative" here means those who, "Under the infusion of Saturn...devote themselves to the contemplative life in hermitage and religious solitude...in silence and chastity."²⁶⁶ Again, we have the emphasis on solitude, silence, and chastity, all qualities of Saturn. Furthermore, St. Benedict's first speech demonstrates the same Saturnine focus on the terrestrial geography and terrain of the contemplative life that we saw in St. Peter Damian's third speech (*Par.* 21.106-35). Great height forms one half of the link between Saturn and astrology in *Conv.* 2.13, and duly features again in the mentions of the summit of Cassino (*Par.* 22.37-8) and "that truth which so uplifts us [*ci soblima*]" (*Par.* 22.42). The indication of the contemplative men refers to the heat that "gives birth to holy flowers and fruits" (*Par.* 22.48), a phrase that recalls a reference in Cassian to "the flowers and fruit of the anchorites."²⁶⁷ The Saturnine associations with enclosure and restriction appear in the references to the contemplatives who "stayed...within the cloisters and kept [tennero] a steadfast heart" (*Par.* 22.50-51) and in St. Benedict's description of his own actions in "imposing control" through law-giving and monastic foundations.²⁶⁸ The second speech begins with St. Benedict's description of the *idée fixe* of the contemplative—"the last [l'ultima] sphere" (*Par.* 22.62), upon which he speaks as a primary authority. The great height of Saturn the seventh sphere can also be seen when St. Benedict speaks of Dante's "high desire" (*Par.* 22.61), as well as the emblem of the ladder with its "upper part" that cannot be seen (*Par.* 22.71) and the lifting of the foot from earth required to ascend it (*Par.* 22.73-4). But the dominant theme

sperimentazione paradisiaca che pertiene al pellegrino" Della Terza 72). Della Terza's last phrase is rather clunky and infelicitous. I prefer my own "process of acclimation" above.

²⁶⁶ *Codice cassinese* (1350-75), comm. *Par.* 21.15, *Dartmouth*. The references are not necessary, *contra* Mackin, to justify St. Benedict's own presence in Saturn (Mackin 116-7). That said, they *should* serve to remind us, who are apt to associate him too exclusively and anachronistically with cenobitic monasticism, that St. Benedict rightly belongs in the company of the great hermits.

²⁶⁷ Cassian, *Conf.* 18.6.1 (639).

²⁶⁸ Tambling, "Saturn" 634; cf. *Par.* 22.37-45.

of Benedict's second address to the pilgrim emerges as the decline from the "golden age," not only of his own order, but of the Church herself. The great father of Western monks presents his judgment upon his contemporary progeny through the metaphor of ruin, where "my Rule remains for waste of paper," and "The walls, which used to be an abbey, have become dens [spelonche]" (*Par.* 22.74-7). Apart from the image of ruined walls, these "dens" recall the dark, cold, and dry caves in the earth traditionally associated with Saturn by for instance Michael Scot (1175-c.1232) and the eleventh-century Sephardic astrologer, Abraham Ibn Ezra.²⁶⁹ In other words, the heights of Saturnine contemplation provide the ultimate perspective from which to survey the decline from the Golden Age.

In a *Lectura Dantis* on Canto 22, Silvio Pasquazi states his belief that the word *vedere* ("too see") occurs more frequently in this than in any other canto, and St. Benedict concludes his third speech with an invitation to the pilgrim to view the melancholy ruin of the Church with the eyes of contemplation using three different terms for seeing, one in each of three different lines: "if you look at [guardi] the beginning of each, and then look again [riguardi] whither it has strayed, you will see [vederai] the white changed to dark" (ll. 91-3).²⁷⁰ The long decline, viewed as a color changing from white to the black of mourning, becomes the object of contemplation here. Even the biblical miracles adduced as reasons for comfort, "Jordan driven back, and the sea fleeing" (ll. 94-5), also presented as "sights" (*veder*), contemplative objects, are explicit results of Saturnine influence. Recall that Ptolemy had written that Saturn causes "the high and ebb tides of the seas and in rivers excessive floods..." (*Quad.* 2.8).²⁷¹

The degree to which St. Benedict's life (according to St. Gregory), monastic *Rule*, and speeches to the pilgrim within Canto 22 exhibit Saturnine traits and associations marks him as a figure of unique

²⁶⁹ Scot, qtd. in Kay 354, n. 37, and Ibn Ezra 82. Although there is an obvious intertext here with the "den of thieves [*speluncam latronum*]" of Jer. 7:11 (qtd. in Mt. 21:13 and Lk. 19:46), the *spelonche* that the great abbeys have become can also be seen hopefully as a potential return to the golden beginnings of monasticism. Thus the holy men of Hebrews 11:38 wander "in deserts, in mountains and in dens and in caves of the earth [in speluncis et in cavernis terrae]" and St. Benedict himself lived three years in "a narrow cave [specus]" at the beginning of his monastic life (*Dial.* 2.1.4.40; *SC* 132; *Life* 2, 7). Cf. Kay 225.

²⁷⁰ Silvio Pasquazi, *Il Canto XXII del Paradiso* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1965), 8.

²⁷¹ Ptolemy 181; cf. Kay 221-2.

resonance with the planetary ruler. But it should be clear that Benedict is not merely a *Saturnus redux*, but as I have suggested, a *Saturnus redemptus*. That is, St. Benedict echoes many of the traditional Saturnine qualities more or less unchanged, and where these are truly negative he reverses them in ways that nevertheless remind us of the astrological and mythological sources. The mythological Saturn forever bore the dark ignominy of having eaten his own children, whereas it is precisely the paternal affection St. Benedict has demonstrated (“L’affetto che dimostri”—*Par.* 22.52) toward the pilgrim that prompts the latter to call him *padre*. That profound love for his “sons” accords wonderfully with the evidence of the *Rule* itself too. Obviously, the great contemplative had no biological children, but as St. Peter Damian put it, his deeper paternity would “fill the heavenly mansions with a throng of monks living an angelic life.”²⁷² By contrast, Dante the poet almost seems to speak ironically when he calls Saturn and Jupiter father and son (*Par.* 22.145-46).

²⁷² St. Peter Damian, “A Homily in Honor and Praise of St. Benedict, Abbot and Confessor,” McNulty 159.

6.

“Here is Macarius, here is Romualdus”

Macarius and Romuald

Among the other “contemplative men” in Saturn’s sphere, said to be filled with so many souls “that I thought every light which appears in heaven had been poured down from it” (*Par.* 21.32-3), St. Benedict names only two: Macarius and Romuald (*Par.* 22.49). Shrouded in silence, these hoary figures of the monastic tradition form striking additions to the Saturnine *collegio* (to use Dante’s term in *Par.* 22.98). Unless we count the so-called “Brief Rule” recorded in Bruno-Boniface of Querfurt’s *Vita Quinque Fratrum Eremitarum* 32, St. Romuald wrote nothing, and we do not even know for certain who this Macarius is.²⁷³ Most commentators believe him to be one of two figures of third- and fourth-century Egypt, though as we shall see there is at least one other Macarius who should be taken into account.²⁷⁴ Unfortunately, at this point a passing indication that this Macarius’s identity is uncertain but that he was probably a “promoter of monasticism in the East” has become proverbial, being parroted repeatedly by commentators for the last couple of hundred years. Furthermore, scholars find it unlikely that any of these Macarii wrote anything either. Both of these “contemplative men,” Maccarius *and* Romuald, would seem to be silent not only in Saturn’s sphere, but in history as well.

This point however does not mean Saints Macarius and Romuald have no reason at all to be present in Saturn’s sphere. Indeed, there can be no doubt that they are contemplative hermits, and as I have suggested, their silence itself makes them in that one respect more Saturnine than even Saints Peter

²⁷³ In Belisle, *Sources* 102, and with Latin text and commentary by Raphael Brown in Jean Leclercq & Bl. Paul Giustiniani. *Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine, and Rule of Blessed Paul Giustiniani*, ed. the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona (Bloomington, O.H.: Ercam, 2003), 485-503. I will refer to Brown’s translation throughout, citing it simply as Brown.

²⁷⁴ Singleton’s note is representative (*Par.* II 22.49; 361). Grandgent hazards a guess that Dante refers “probably [to] St. Macarius of Alexandria” (859, n. 49). More recently, Anthony Esolen states simply, “...Macarius may be either of two Egyptian hermits, disciples of Saint Anthony of Egypt in the fourth century” (237, n.).

Damian or Benedict. But we are left to fall back on much more obscure and fragmentary evidence if we are to understand why Macarius and Romuald “were predestined to this office” of being pointed out among the *collegio* (*Par.* 21.77-8). Furthermore, there is no hope of separating their lives, writings, and Dantean speeches as with Saints Peter Damian and Benedict. They have no speeches in Dante, and biography and text are intimately bound together even if there is some category of “writing” (in this case, monastic rules) that medieval readers might have ascribed to either of them.

Due to his uncertain identity, the difficulty of addressing Macarius’s special significance for Dante is the greater of the two. The ancient commentators call him a “most-holy hermit,” point out a church dedicated to him in Gascony, and relate a story told of a Macarius in the *Verba Seniorum*, or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, but otherwise do not concern themselves with him.²⁷⁵ As far as I can tell Baldassare Lombardi (1791-2) is the first commentator to acknowledge that there are at least two “most-holy men” of that name.²⁷⁶ Generally speaking, later commentators follow Lombardi, and usually go further to specify that these two are, first, Macarius the Egyptian, also known as Macarius the Great (c. 300-390), one of the founders of the Lower Egyptian settlement at Scetis (Wadi al-Natrun); and second, Macarius the Alexandrian, or “City man” (c. 300-393), the superior of the more northerly settlement of

²⁷⁵ See respectively Benvenuto, *Chiose ambrosiane*, and L’Ottimo commento, comm. *Par.* 22.49, *Dartmouth*. Cf. Macarius the Great 13, in Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, rev. ed. (Kalamazoo, M.I.: Cistercian, 1984), 130. G.A. Scartazzini (1872-82) also gives a fairly careful history of the commentary tradition on this question in comm. *Par.* 22.49, *Dartmouth*.

The *Verba seniorum*, along with two other Late Antique texts relevant to the figures named “Macarius,” the *Lausiac History* and the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, as well as several fourth- and fifth-century Lives of hermits and excerpts from Cassian’s writings, were all included in the larger early medieval corpus known as the *Vitae Patrum*, or *Vitaspatrum* (*VP*). Besides having inspired the eremitic revival of the eleventh century, the whole *VP* was commonly mined for *exempla* in mendicant preaching, and was translated into Italian for lay readers by Domenico Cavalca in the third decade of the *Trecento*. See Domenico Cavalca, *Vite dei Santi Padri*, 2 vols., ed. Carlo Delcorno (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2009). For a brief overview of the contents as Cavalca found them, see Carlo Delcorno, *La Tradizione delle “Vite dei Santi Padri”* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2000), 533-34.

Delcorno notes that for some of his translation, Cavalca followed a manuscript tradition resembling Laurentian codex Pluteo 20, dext. 5, from the Franciscan convent of Santa Croce in Florence (Delcorno, *Tradizione* 535, 555). Dante is known to have done a good deal of study at Santa Croce, and it is tantalizing to suppose that he might have known that very manuscript of the *VP*.

²⁷⁶ Comm. *Par.* 22.49, *Dartmouth*. The two Macarii of Egypt are quite clearly distinguished by Palladius himself, as well as in the Latin translation of the *Hist. Laus.* and in Cavalca’s translation of the *VP* (Palladius 54; *PL* 73.1109B; Cavalca 1.726). Petrarch had also distinguished the two in *De vita solitaria* 2.1: “I shall not speak of the two Macarii who lived in happy solitude, one to the age of 90, the other of 100, accomplishing amazing works” (Petrarch 188).

Kellia, who features heavily in Palladius's *Lausiaca History* (the old Latin translation of which bears the significantly Dantean title of *Paradisus*) as well as the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* translated by Rufinus of Aquileia (344/5-411).²⁷⁷ Tommaseo identifies Dante's Macarius as the Alexandrian, on whom the weight of consensus generally falls, and adds the interesting details that he was "a rector of five thousand monks, who wrote monastic rules."²⁷⁸ Many commentators suggest that Macarius was chosen to represent Eastern monasticism, and by the twentieth century they also commonly note that Dante himself may not have distinguished between the two Macarii.²⁷⁹ As far as I have seen, only Edmund Gardner has proposed (without argument unfortunately) another, third Macarius: Macarius the Roman, "a Roman noble who became an anchorite of the desert, [who] is the hero of one of the most amazing legends in that fascinating mediaeval book of devout fairy tales, Cavalca's *Vite de' Santi Padri*;..." that is, in Domenico Cavalca's translation of the *VP* (c. 1320s)²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2004), 18. On the Alexandrian, see Palladius, *Hist. Laus.* 18 in Palladius 58-67 and *Historia monachorum* 23 in Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Kalamazoo, M.I.: Cistercian, 1980), 113. On the Egyptian, see Palladius, *Hist. Laus.* 17 (54-8) and *Hist. monach.* 21 (108-10), as well as Harmless 194-6, 220-1. Both also feature in the *Apophthegmata*, but the Egyptian certainly predominates (cf. Ward 124-38 and Ward 151-2). On the two monastic histories, see Harmless 275-308.

²⁷⁸ Tommaseo, comm. *Par.* 22.49, *Dartmouth*. The reference to five thousand monks and to monastic rules has as its basis an ancient Rule, likely from the famed island monastery of St. Honorius at Lérins, entitled "The Rule of the Holy Abbot Macarius Who Had Five Thousand Monks under his Authority" (*PL* 103.447). (On this see more below in the discussion of Macarius the Alexandrian.) Other commentators who follow Tommaseo include Raffaello Andreoni (1856), Luigi Bennassutti (1864-7), Brunone Bianchi (1868), Giuseppe Campi (1888-93), and Singleton, *Par. II*, 21.49. Giacomo Poletto (1894) identifies Dante's Macarius as the Egyptian, but Casini & S.A. Barbi (1921) insist that Dante's Macarius must be the Alexandrian and warn against confusing him with the Egyptian. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi insists: "Maccarius is almost certainly Saint Macarius of Alexandria, ... the two were perhaps confused, but certainly it is the first who, like Romuald, can have the representative function of initiator that Dante assigns to him." Comm. *Par.* 22.49, *Dartmouth*. Cf. John Carroll 349, n.2, Grandgent 859, n. 49, and Singleton, *Par. II*, 22.49.

²⁷⁹ On Macarius as Eastern representative (many commentators state that he "promoted monasticism" in the East), see Poletto and Longfellow, along with H.F. Tozer (1901), Francesco Torraca (1905), Enrico Mestica (1909), Tommaso, and Casini & Barbi. The idea that Dante did not distinguish the Macarii, whether intentionally or not, is suggested by Scartazzini (1872-82) Carlo Steiner (1921), Scartazzini & G. Vandelli (1929), Dino Provenzal (1938), Manfredi Porena (1946-48), and Daniele Mattalia (1960). I find it highly unlikely that Dante would not have known there were at least three distinct Macarii if he had read of them in *VP*, since as we have seen, they are all clearly distinguished there, as well as later by Petrarch.

²⁸⁰ Gardner 161. For a critical edition of the original Greek text of the *Vita Sancti Macarii Romani*, see Afanasii Vasiliev, ed., "10. Zhitie Makaria Rimskago," *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina, Pars Prior* (Moscow: Imperial Moscow U, 1893), 135-65. For the standard Latin text, see Heribert Rosweyde, ed., "Octobris XXIII. Vita Sancti Macarii Romani, Servi Dei, qui inventus est juxta paradisum, auctoribus Theophilo, Sergio, et Hygino," *PL* 73.415-426. Carlo Delcorno has edited the text of Cavalca's Italian translation in Cavalca, *Vite* 2, 1441-65. For an English

I shall begin with the least likely of the three, Macarius the Egyptian, or the Great. Leaving aside the *Homilies* attributed to him, we have a saying—Macarius the Great 2 in the Alphabetical Collection of Sayings—that anticipates St. Peter Damian’s ascetic “heats and frosts” (*Par.* 21.116).²⁸¹ The devil himself (carrying a scythe!) and later another demon praise him for humility, and thus in effect for his proficiency with St. Benedict’s ladder.²⁸² In *Hist. Laus.* 17.2, Palladius emphasizes the Egyptian’s association with the Saturnine trait of great age by means of the same topos Gregory the Great later uses for St. Benedict: he is called a “παιδαριογέρων,” or according to the Latin in *VP* 8.19, “id est, in puerili aetate senex....”²⁸³ In an interesting correlation to St. Benedict’s denunciation of monastic avarice (a Saturnine vice) in *Par.* 22.79-84, Palladius relates that this Macarius prophetically warned a monk against avarice.²⁸⁴ Finally, both the *Hist. Laus.* (17.10) and the *Hist. monach.* (21.15) expressly indicate that this Macarius often dwelt in a cave.²⁸⁵ Thus, the relevance of the Egyptian to *Par.* 21-22 includes another reference to climatic extremes, his association with old age, his reputation for humility, his judgment against avarice, and his association with cave-dwelling.

These are, however, relatively meagre ties to *Paradiso*. By contrast, Macarius the Alexandrian, towards whom most commentators that are inclined to pick have leaned, has much more to recommend him. A saying under his name has him speaking authoritatively on just judgment when correcting

translation of the Latin see Benedict Baker, trans., “Life No. 13: The Life of Saint Macarius of Rome, a servant of God who was found to be near Paradise,” *Vitae Patrum*, ed. Heribert Rosweyde, vitae-patrum.org.uk.

²⁸¹ Ward 152. A large collection of homilies were “attributed almost universally” to Macarius the Egyptian until the nineteenth century (George A. Maloney, Introduction, *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies & the Great Letter* [N.Y.: Paulist, 1992], 6). It is possible but perhaps unlikely that Dante would have known any of these homilies, since the first selections were translated into Latin by Angelo Clareno in Greece only in the first years of the *Trecento* (on the translation, see Maloney 23; on the timing of Clareno’s pilgrimage to Greece, see Steven N. Botterill, “Angelo Clareno,” *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Christopher Kleinheinz [N.Y.: Routledge, 2004], 36).

²⁸² Macarius the Great 11, 36 (Ward 129-30, 136). The *Verba seniorum* also include a fascinating story involving a conversation of Macarius the Egyptian with the skull of a pagan priest that seems to anticipate aspects of Dante’s eschatology of hell and purgatory (Macarius the Great 38, Ward 136-7). Both this story and the encounter with the scythe-carrying devil are included in the *Legenda Aurea*, making it still more likely that Dante would have known those stories (Jacobus 89-91).

²⁸³ Palladius 54; *PL* 73.1109C.

²⁸⁴ Palladius, *Hist. Laus.* 17.4 (55).

²⁸⁵ Palladius 57, Russell 110. On the significance of caves for Saturn, see Kay 225-6.

monastics, thus reflecting the spirit of the Saturnine thrones, “whence God in judgment shines upon us” (Par. 9.162).²⁸⁶ One passage in Palladius has him passing through heat and cold like Peter Damian in *Par.* 21.116, and another seems to suggest the contemplative ladder of Saturn: “...I wanted...to keep my mind fixed upon God...[so] I gave these orders to my mind: ‘Do not descend from heaven, for there you have angels, archangels, the powers above, the God of all of us; only do not descend from heaven.’”²⁸⁷ In *Hist. Laus.* 18.26, the Alexandrian accuses himself in terms highly reminiscent of the old age and malice of Saturn, as well as his connection with devouring and gluttony: “[you] decrepit old man ...devourer in the extreme of your age...you wicked old man.”²⁸⁸

Two traditions in particular that are associated with Macarius the Alexandrian make his case a good one in my view, however. First, in *Hist. Laus.* 18.5-9, Palladius says that the Alexandrian undertook a pilgrimage through the desert, using the stars to find his way to the legendary garden-tomb of Pharaoh’s magicians, Jannes and Jambres.²⁸⁹ The Latin version in the *VP* adds a couple of fascinating details to this pilgrimage tale that may well have appealed to Dante even further. First of all, we learn that the ancient magicians had the garden constructed for themselves “in the hope that after their death they might enjoy the delights of paradise.” Second, we are told that Macarius found his way to this supposed desert

²⁸⁶ Macarius of Alexandria 2 (Ward 152).

²⁸⁷ Palladius *Hist. Laus.* 18.3 (59) and 18.17 (63). The second passage is quoted in the note on Macarius by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, trans., *Paradiso* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, n.d.), 303, n. 49.

²⁸⁸ *PL* 74.276B (cf. Palladius 66). The version of the *Hist. Laus.* in Rosweyde’s text of *VP* 8 is actually a sixteenth-century Latin translation of the *Hist. Laus.* Rosweyde relegated the more common medieval version, which Cuthbert Butler calls “Latin Version I,” to Appendix I of *VP*, under the title *Paradisus Heraclidis*, in *PL* 74.243ff. Although there is another medieval version in Appendix II of *VP* (*PL* 74.343ff.), as far as I can tell Latin Version I is that most likely to have been known to Dante, particularly since it is found in several manuscripts from Santa Croce in Florence. See Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius: A Critical Discussion Together with Notes on Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 58-64.

The translation Rosweyde prints in *VP* 8 omits this story of the Alexandrian’s self-accusation; I have given my translation of the relevant phrases from Latin Version I in *PL* 74.276B.

²⁸⁹ The story of these magicians is told in Ex. 7:10-12, where the Vulgate calls them “sapientes et maleficos” (which may remind one of Saturn!). The names however, later given in the Talmud as *Jochana* and *Mamre*, are first attested only in 2 Timothy 3:8. Origen of Alexandria (3rd c. CE) believed Paul to have found them in a certain *Jannes et Mambres liber*, no longer extant. See Newport J.D. White, “The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus,” *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament, Vol. 4*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Eerdmans, 1956), 172. I am not aware of any antecedents for the legend of their “garden-tomb.”

paradise by following the course of the stars.²⁹⁰ But a version of the story also appears earlier in the *VP*, in Rufinus's modified translation of *Hist. monach.* 21.5-12, found in *VP* 2.29. Rufinus adds the detail that Macarius the Alexandrian loved the desert (*eremus*): "In fact he penetrated so far into the most distant and inaccessible places of the desert that he came across a certain place which had been set up at the farthest boundaries where fruit bearing trees had been planted and which was replete with all kinds of good things."²⁹¹ The love of desert solitude itself is a Saturnine trait according to all of the astrological sources, but also this idea of an earthly paradise being found at some distant boundary seems to anticipate Dante's own earthly Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory (identified with the Golden Age in *Pur.* 28.139-41). Both in turn recall the boundary of Alexander's Arch at the Land of the Blessed (Dead)—akin to Saturn's Isles of the Blessed—in the *Alexander Romance*.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ *VP* 8.20; Benedict Baker, trans., *Vitae Patrum*, ed. Heribert Rosweyde, vitae-patrum.org.uk. Cf. Palladius 59-61 and *PL* 73.1114A-B. This story is a particularly clear example of the constant danger of confusing the two fourth-century Macarii in the Egyptian desert, even in the earliest sources (see for instance, Antoine Guillaumont, "Le problème des deux Macaire dans les Apophthegmata Patrum," *Irénikon* 48 [1975], 44-9). In the *VP*, at least two versions of this story are told of Macarius the Alexandrian, one in *VP* 2.29 (*PL* 21.453A-C) and one in *VP* 8.20 (*PL* 73.1113D-1115C). The version in *VP* 2.29 is Rufinus's modification of a story told about Macarius the Egyptian in the original Greek version, *Hist. monach.* 21.5-12. For a translation of the Greek, see Russell 108-9, and on Rufinus's changes see Russell 152. On Rufinus's role in the creation of the Latin *Hist. monach.*, see Francis X. Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411): His Life and Works* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America, 1945), 175-9. Latin Version I of Palladius's account of the story is in *PL* 74.271A-272A, while the Latin Version II variant is found in *PL* 74.360C-361A.

One crucial difference between Rufinus's account and Palladius's is that in the *Hist. Laus.* version of the story, both in the Greek original and in all three Latin versions in *VP*, the magician's earthly "paradise" turns out to be quite disappointing: "Upon entering, I found a hanging brass jar and an iron chain near the well, already consumed by time; the pomegranates had nothing inside, so dried out were they by the sun" (Palladius 60). This aspect of the story carries its own interest, however. In the Latin, the description of the jar hanging (*suspensum*) by a chain, consumed by time (*temporis vetustate consumptum*), and the dryness of the pomegranates, carry heavy Saturnine associations. Recall that Varro's explanation of *pendēre* (the root of *suspensus*) includes a reference to the scales for weighing (*pensuram*) in the Temple of Saturn (*De lingua* 5.36.183), one of Saturn's two basic qualities is dryness, and the image of being consumed by time should require no explanation.

²⁹¹ *VP* 2.29; Baker. Migne placed Rufinus's version of *Hist. monach.* with his other writings in *PL* 21 rather than with *VP* in *PL* 73. The story of Macarius's visit to the garden is thus found in *PL* 21.453A-C.

²⁹² Although their geographical location (to the East) differs from the Western isles of tradition, Pseudo-Callisthenes explicitly includes "the Land of the Blest" on the inscription of the arch Alexander builds in the *Alexander Romance* 2.41 and which Theophilus and his companions see in *VSMR* 8 (Ps.-Callisthenes, "The Alexander Romance," *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B.P. Reardon [Berkeley, C.A.: U of California, 1989], 712). Cf. the "blessed fields" set apart for the pious dead and traditionally ruled by Saturn after the Golden Age in Horace, *Epode* 16.41-2, 63-4 (Horace, *Odes & Epodes*, ed. & trans. Niall Rudd [Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard U, 2004], 308-11). On the early history of this myth and its legacy in Mediterranean place names, see H. Wagenvoort, "The Journey of the Souls of the Dead to the Isles of the Blessed," *Mnemosyne* 4.24.2 (1971), 113-61. Wagenvoort adopts the term "makaria" (from a plain in the Peloponnesos, Makaria, interpreted as "country of the dead") as a generic designation of land

The second tradition that strengthens the case for Macarius the Alexandrian is the aforementioned monastic Rule attributed to him (*RMac*).²⁹³ This attribute increases his resemblance to Saturn the law-giver, particularly as *RMac* identifies the monastic cell in terms of Paradise itself: “Regard your cell as paradise....”²⁹⁴ Furthermore, Wathen highlights the apparently disproportionate preoccupation of such a brief rule with the central aspect of the Saturnine climate—the practice of silence.²⁹⁵ If Dante knew of *RMac*, which had been collected by St. Benedict of Aniane (c. 750-821) in his great *Codex Regularum* during the Carolingian reform of monasticism, then it would mean that to some degree or another all four Saturnine souls (Peter Damian, Benedict, Macarius, and Romuald) would be monastic law-givers.²⁹⁶ Thus, the relevance of the Alexandrian to *Par.* 21-22 includes association with judgment, with ascetic endurance of climatic extremes, with angelic ascent and descent like Jacob’s ladder, with old age, with the pilgrimage via the stars to a kind of paradise, and with the authorship of a monastic rule.

To turn to Gardner’s suggestion, as an individual monastic figure Macarius the Roman does not perhaps have much to recommend him to Dante aside from having originated in Rome before making his pilgrimage to the East and dwelling in a cave. However, the story in which he is embedded has multiple affinities with the *Commedia*, including the frame of a pilgrimage into a medieval otherworld, featuring a

which would have been set aside as a taboo or sacred space where the souls of the dead would gather before their final journey to the West (139-40, 143).

²⁹³ This is the aforementioned Rule from Lérins. See Terrence Kardong’s introduction, translation, and commentary in “The Rule of the Holy Abbot Macarius Who Had Five Thousand Monks under his Authority,” *ABR* 59.4 (2008), 419-39. There is also a Latin text and alternate translation in Carmela Viricillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, & J. Alcuin Francis, trans., *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis* (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical P, 1982), 40-51. According to S.G. Luff, the *RMac* was implemented more or less by itself at two monasteries along the lines of the Eastern lauras in the Langres diocese in the Côte-d’Or in the later fifth-century. See S.G. Luff, “A Survey of Primitive Monasticism in Central Gaul (c. 350 to 700),” *Downside Review* 70 (1952), 187. Wathen apparently misinterprets Luff’s use of the definite article when he attributes to him the view that *RMac* was “the rule propagated and kept at Lérins [italics mine]” (cf. Luff 195 and Wathen, *Silence* 156).

²⁹⁴ *RMac* 6.3 (Franklin, *et al.* 43). Cf. Kardong, “Rule” 423.

²⁹⁵ Wathen, *Silence* 156-7.

²⁹⁶ On St. Benedict of Aniane, see Allen Cabaniss, trans., *Benedict of Aniane: The Emperor’s Monk—Ardo’s Life* (Kalamazoo, M.I.: Cistercian, 2008). It is also worth noting that the *Concordia regularum* that St. Benedict of Aniane compiled often makes use of the Rule of Macarius to comment on *RB*. See for example the first passage appended to Step 4 of the Ladder of Humility (*RB* 7.35-43) in Hugh Feiss, Ronald E. Pepin, & Maureen M. O’Brien, eds., *A Benedictine Reader: 530-1530* (Collegeville, M.N.: Liturgical P, 2019), 58.

kind of hell, purgatory, and paradise.²⁹⁷ The *Vita Sancti Macarii Romani* (henceforth *VSMR*) narrates not so much the biography of its subject as it does two such journeys to find the earthly Paradise: that of the narrator (one “Theophilus”) with two companions, and that of St. Macarius himself, whom they meet at the end of their own journey. While nothing in *VSMR* expressly identifies the earthly Paradise with the Golden Age, as Dante does in *Pur.* 28.139-41, the pilgrims’ encounter with the Arch of Alexander, marking the border of the Lands of the Blessed (Dead), casts St. Macarius’s world (like the “paradise” of Macarius the Alexandrian as well as Dante’s earthly Paradise in *Purgatorio*) as a traditional Saturnian realm.²⁹⁸ Beyond the Arch lies an ambiguously purgatorial or infernal world of souls undergoing punishment, and beyond that angels and righteous elders like those of Rev. 4:4 and 4:10.

Within this otherworldly region, Macarius himself astonishes the pilgrims with his extremely rustic and aged appearance (cf. the Saturnine traits of poverty and old age) when he comes to them in his cave:

[His hair was] white as snow,... he was very old, and his eyes were not visible because of the way his eyebrows hung over them, his toenails and fingernails were exceedingly long, his beard and hair covered his whole body, his voice sounded thinly as if coming from some deep place, and the skin of his face was as hard as the shell of a tortoise.²⁹⁹

Most spectacular of all, Macarius the Roman experiences a contemplative vision that far exceeds anything ascribed to the two Macarii of Egypt, nearly rivalling that of St. Benedict. After spending three years

²⁹⁷ The Latin text of the *Vita Sancti Macarii Romani* is found in *Vitae Patrum* 1 (*PL* 73.415-26, trans. Benedict Baker, “Book 1b.13,” vitae-patrum.ork.uk). For an edition of the original Greek text, see Afanasii Vasiliev, ed., “10. Zhitie Makaria Rimskago,” *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina, Pars Prior* (Moscow: Imperial Moscow U, 1893), 135-65. On the *VSMR* see Silvia Acerbi, “*iuxta paradisum*: Mundos Imaginarios en la Hagiografía Tardoantiqua de Oriente y de Occidente,” *Studia historica* 27 (2009), 119-24, Christine Angelidi, “La Vie de Macaire le Romain: écrire pour le plaisir?,” *La face cachée de la littérature Byzantine. Le texte en tant que message immédiat. Actes du colloque international, Paris, 5-6-7 juin 2008*, ed. P. Odorico (Paris, 2012), 167-78, and Zissis D. Ainalis, “From Hades to Hell: Christian Visions of the Underworld (2nd-5th centuries CE),” *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition: Visits to the Underworld from Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. Gunnel Ekroth & Ingela Nilsson (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 277-83. Unfortunately Alison Morgan entirely neglects the *Vita Sancti Macarii Romani* in her otherwise rather exhaustive treatment of sources for the medieval otherworld.

²⁹⁸ *VSMR* 8. All translations are Baker’s.

²⁹⁹ *VSMR* 15.

buried up to his neck in the earth, and forty days and nights prostrate on the ground after being unearthed by a pair of lions, he tells his monastic visitors:³⁰⁰

“At the ending of those forty days I went inside the cave and behold, the four corners of the cave shone brilliantly with a heavenly light and I saw the human form of our Saviour Christ, holding a golden rod [auream...virgam] in his hand....There were thunderings [tonitrua] and dazzling lightnings....When I saw and heard the immensity of the vision I was terrified. Caught up into an ecstasy, I fell to the ground and remained there for eight days, and then I understood how Christ our Lord, the Saviour of the world, had gone into the cave and blessed it.”³⁰¹

To begin with, we have here the heavenly light of St. Benedict’s vision (Gregory, *Dial.* II.35). In an ascetic context, the golden *virga* might be taken as a sign of authority and discipline,³⁰² but it might also allude to the biblical rods of Moses and Aaron by which they conducted the Exodus, or to a royal scepter such as the *aurea virga* of Assuerus in Esth. 4:11 or the *virga aequitatis*, *virga regni tui* that Heb. 1:8 gives for Ps. 44:7 Vul. (kingship being an attribute of Saturn and *aequitas* of the Golden Age), or perhaps best of all, the “reed like unto a rod” that St. John is given in Rev. 11:1 in order to measure the temple, an act seemingly linked with Varro’s etymology of “temple” itself and therefore with the root of “contemplation.”³⁰³ As for the thunders that Macarius hears (*tonitrua*—an echo of the *tonitrua* that accompany the thrones and elders of Rev. 4:5), we have seen already that these recur verbally and audibly

³⁰⁰ The close association with earth and ascetic burial themselves constitute prominent Saturnine qualities. One wonders too if the Roman’s prominent association with lions that help to temper his passions might partially lie behind Saturn’s position under the Lion’s breast in *Par.* 21.14-5.

³⁰¹ *VSMR* 22; cf. *PL* 73:425C (Latin) and Vasiliev 164 (Greek). At this last line there is an interesting discrepancy among the texts. The Greek uses the aorist verb *ēgiasen*, meaning “hallowed” or “sanctified,” but the Latin does not merely say “blessed,” as Baker has it. In Rosweyde we find two verbs used to describe Christ’s actions: “speluncam benedixerit, illamque sanctificaverit” (*PL* 73:425C). In this way the Latin text not only alludes to the Institution of the Mass in the first two Gospels, where Jesus “panem et benedixit ac fregit” and “panem...benedicens fregit” respectively (Mt. 26:26, Mk. 14:22), but to the Institution of the Sabbath (Saturn’s day) in the Vulgate text of Gen. 8:3 (“et benedixit diei septimo et sanctificavit illum”)!

³⁰² Susanna Barsella considers the *virga* (It. *verghetta*) wielded by the Heavenly Messenger in *Inf.* 14.79-103 in “The Mercurial *Integumentum* of the Heavenly Messenger (*Inferno* IX 79-103),” *Letteratura italiana antica* 4 (2003), 383-7.

³⁰³ Varro, *De lingua* 7.8-9. In his discussion of the *templum in caelo*, Varro quotes Ennius: “Conteremuit templum magnum Iovis altitonantis...” (*De lingua* 7.7). Thus temple, thunder, and contemplation all become linked.

in *Par.* 21, and Macarius's response to the entire vision could lie behind the "amazement" with which Dante the pilgrim is oppressed after the thunderous cry (*Par.* 22.1).³⁰⁴

To conclude, the two Macarii of fourth-century Egypt both exhibit histories and associations that make them appropriate denizens of Dante's Saturn. Their main distinguishing features are the pilgrimage to "paradise" and the monastic rule attributed to Macarius the Alexandrian on the one hand, and the greater space devoted to Macarius the Egyptian in the *Verba Seniorum* on the other. Macarius the Roman brings something new, with his situation at the end of an otherworldly journey somewhat akin to Dante's and the profound contemplative experience attributed to him. While I know of no definitive evidence that Dante knew any of the writings I have cited about any of the Macarii, he obviously knew something of at least one of them. If he was aware of more than one distinct individual by the name, he does nothing to indicate that and does not distinguish his Macarius from any other.³⁰⁵ Therefore, I consider the passages I have cited about all three to be worth considering as possible inspirations or sources for the *Commedia* and the inclusion of a "Macarius" in Saturn's sphere, though I find the accounts of the Alexandrian's pilgrimage in *VP* and the *RMac* attributed to him, followed by *VSMR* (Macarius the Roman) to be the most impressive.³⁰⁶ That is, I believe Macarius the Alexandrian the most likely, but Macarius the Roman to be worthy of further consideration. But whoever he is, Macarius is certainly an old ascetic and contemplative who likely dwelt as a hermit in a desert cave/den and exercised direction over other monks, and these features alone make his inclusion in Saturn's sphere appropriate.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ One wonders about the exact reasoning behind the textual chronology, but it is notable that the editors of *RB1980* identify a possible quote from *VSMR* 2 in *RB* 58.16 (*RB1980*, 268, n. 58.16). Rosweyde's text of *VSMR* has "ac iugo regulae colla" (*PL* 73.415C) where *RB* has "collum...de sub iugo regulae" (Benedict 188).

³⁰⁵ It seems surprising, however, that he would not have known of more than one Macarius since, as we have seen, the materials in the *Vitae Patrum* make it amply clear, Petrarch did not miss the fact in the middle of the Trecento (Petrarch 188).

³⁰⁶ Tambling refers to the combination of more than one Macarius as an example of "the excess of the signifier" germane to his construal of Saturnine melancholy in *Par.* 21-22 (643).

³⁰⁷ I do not know whether Dante would have been aware of the meaning of the name, i.e., "Blessed," or *Beatus* in Latin. Though the *Prima Vita* obliquely hints at the true etymology with the quotation from Ps. 1:3 in *VSMR* 15 (*PL* 73.421B), Jacobus de Voragine (13th c.) had made the particularly fanciful suggestion in *Legenda Aurea* 18 (about Macarius the Egyptian) that the name was "derived from *macha*, skillfulness, and *ares*, virtue, or from *macha*,

Fortunately, there can be no doubt about St. Romuald's identity, and his inclusion in *Par.* 22 is much easier to explain.³⁰⁸ The historical Romuald (d. c.1025/7) hailed from the significant Dantean city of Ravenna (see the comments on Peter Damian above in section 4), where he began his monastic life as a traditional Benedictine—and was later briefly abbot—at the Abbey of Sant' Apollinare at Classe.³⁰⁹ More importantly, St. Romuald also sat as an inspiration and model figure at the head of the medieval revival of the eremitic life, and of the specifically Camaldolese form that life took, that produced St. Peter Damian.³¹⁰ As such Romuald is ultimately a figure of incalculable importance for medieval religious life, for it was this movement that eventually led to the founding of the austere orders, such as that of Cîteaux, which passed the ideals of the early Desert Fathers down to the mendicants that figure so large in the Church of Dante's time.³¹¹ Certainly, St. Romuald's status as hermit as well as monastic founder adequately explains his juxtaposition with either of the two Egyptian Saints Macarius. But there is the further link that according to Damian's *Vita Beati Romualdi* (*VBR*), St. Romuald was inspired in his implementation of the Eastern *laura* pattern of the eremitic life (essentially, the observance of Scetis and Kellia) precisely by reading the main source of stories about the Macarii, the *VP*.³¹²

beating, and *rio*, master" (*The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U, 1993], 89).

³⁰⁸ On St. Romuald, see the critical edition of the *Vita Beati Romualdi* by St. Peter Damian, Tabacco (1957), and the English translation in Belisle, *Sources* 105-75. For an introduction see Belisle, "Overview," and Wong, "Threefold Good," in Belisle, *Privilege* 5-15 and 81-97; Vigilucci 1-41; C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2nd. ed. (London: Longman, 1990), 152-3; Louth 277; and Brooke 87-90. On the *Vita* and hagiographical figure of Romuald, see John Howe, "The Awesome Hermit: The Symbolical Significance of the Hermit as a Possible Research Perspective," *Numen* 30.1 (1983), 106-19 and Colin Phipps, "Romuald-Model Hermit: Eremitical Theory in Saint Peter Damian's *Vita Beati Romualdi*, chs. 16-27," *Monks, Hermits, and the Ascetic Tradition: Papers Read at the 1984 Summer Meeting and the 1985 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (1985), 65-77. Unfortunately, appallingly little has been published on St. Romuald in English.

³⁰⁹ Vigilucci 2-3, 10-11. See the insightful analysis of this episode in Phipps 73.

³¹⁰ Leyser 29. For Damian's construction of St. Romuald as model hermit-figure, see Phipps, "Romuald-Model Hermit" (cited above).

³¹¹ Delcorno 189.

³¹² *VBR* 8; Belisle, *Sources* 115; Tabacco 28. On the influence of *VP* on St. Romuald, see Delcorno, "*Vitae Patrum*" 188. Peter Damian does not specify any particular story or passage of *VP* that might have influenced Romuald in this regard, but in his note on the passage, Tabacco gives as a possible source a brief conversation of Palladius with St. Macarius the Alexandrian in *VP* 8.24 (*Hist. Laus.* 20).

To summarize some of the Saturnine features of Romuald's biography, Damian speaks in *VBR* of how the master's soul was "drawn to solitude," a quintessential Saturnine trait, even as a young layman. He was driven to take the black habit of the Benedictines by his involvement in his father's *infortuna* but appropriately Saturnine crime of killing a relative in a property dispute.³¹³ Having been tonsured at the Abbey of Sant' Apollinare near Ravenna, he rebuked the other monks' lax observance of St. Benedict's *Rule* (exhibiting the Saturnine association with correction and regulation) and undertook the eremitical life as well as the direction of fellow hermits at a young age (*VBR* 4-6).³¹⁴ According to Rudolf of Camaldoli, Romuald built "the Hermitage" of Camaldoli in the Apennines³¹⁵ after a vision "like the prophet Jacob of a very high ladder reaching to heaven, on which were climbing a band dressed in shining white."³¹⁶ Damian praises Romuald's severe fasting (cf. Saturn's lack of concern with the body as well as the simple diet of the Golden Age) and his labor at farming (cf. Saturn's association with agriculture and farmers), and we have already seen Romuald's resolve to temper contemplative solitude with active love towards his brethren.³¹⁷ Furthermore, the *VBR* exemplifies throughout the Saturnine dialectic that we noted in Macrobius's distinction between contemplation of "divine matters" the exercise of "political virtues."³¹⁸ Thus while Romuald "governed his monks according to the strict discipline of the Rule...the saint turned the eyes of his heart toward heaven."³¹⁹ Indeed, Damian later writes, "Often he remained so enraptured in the contemplation of God that he melted in tears completely and burned with an unquenchable fire of divine love...."³²⁰ A priest refers to this fire as "the splendor of so great a star,"

³¹³ *VBR* 1; Belisle, *Sources* 107-8; Tabacco 13-5.

³¹⁴ Belisle, *Sources* 111-5; Tabacco 20-6.

³¹⁵ Dante the poet refers to this foundation in *Pur.* 5.96.

³¹⁶ *Liber eremiticae regulae* 10; Belisle, *Sources* 236.

³¹⁷ *VBR* 6 and 18; Belisle, *Sources* 113-4, 125; Tabacco 26, 42-4. "Tabacco refers to the 'restless life of Romuald [that] seems to witness a continuous contrast between the needs for action and contemplation'" (Belisle, "Overview," *Privilege* 11). Citing *VBR* 18 (Belisle, *Sources* 125; Tabacco 43-44), Phipps considers this concern for the souls of other monks as a *sine qua non* of the Romualdian hermit as constructed by St. Peter Damian (69).

³¹⁸ Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.8.12, 1.8.5-8.

³¹⁹ *VBR* 22; Belisle, *Sources* 128; Tabacco 48.

³²⁰ *VBR* 31; Belisle, *Sources* 140; Tabacco 68. The metaphor of spiritual fire recurs frequently, not just in instances of contemplative experience but in the "divine fire" by which "he lit the torches of others through his holy preaching" (*VBR* 35, in Belisle, *Sources* 145; Tabacco 74-5).

anticipating the description of the Saturnine souls in *Par.* 21.31-3 as “splendors” that suggest to the pilgrim “every light which appears in heaven” pouring down.³²¹ We have already seen how Damian explicitly compares monastic observance under St. Romuald’s direction to the Golden Age.³²² Dante the exile may also have identified with the great founder’s frequent wanderings through the Italian peninsula, but then too in his last days St. Romuald had himself completely enclosed in a cell to “observe silence until death.”³²³ So the Saturnine traits in the *VBR* include the emphasis on St. Romuald’s love of solitude and practice of the eremitic life, his profound contemplative experiences and vision of Jacob’s ladder, and his active regulation of other monks and establishment of monastic foundations, while other details that may have attracted Dante include the comparison of Romuald to a star and his persistent wandering throughout the Italian peninsula.

Although Damian states that St. Romuald wrote an inspired commentary on the Psalms and canticles, this has not come down to us.³²⁴ What we do have is Romuald’s so-called “Brief Rule” (*BR*) preserved by Bruno-Boniface of Querfurt (c. 974-1009) in his *Vita quinque fratrum eremitarum* 32.³²⁵ A student of Dante will be struck first and foremost by the *incipit*, “Sit in the cell as in paradise” (*BR* 1).³²⁶ In this way, like St. Peter Damian’s description of the cell as a “paradise of delights” (*Dominus vobiscum* 19.43), St. Romuald’s injunction to sit is appropriate for the sphere of the thrones and at the same time marks off the hermit’s cell as a microcosm of the celestial world in which the pilgrim moves in *Paradiso*.³²⁷ Indeed, the next line is, “cast all memory of the world [totum mundum] behind you” (*BR* 2), and it is shortly after Romuald is named in *Par.* 22.49 that Dante discovers just how much he himself has cast the world behind him in *Par.* 22.133-53, where Beatrice says to the pilgrim: “And therefore, before

³²¹ *VBR* 46; Belisle, *Sources* 154; Tabacco 88.

³²² *VBR* 64; Belisle, *Sources* 167; Tabacco 104-6.

³²³ *VBR* 69; Belisle, *Sources* 172; Tabacco 111.

³²⁴ *VBR* 50; Belisle, *Sources* 158; Tabacco 93.

³²⁵ Brown 488, 489.

³²⁶ Brown 489. Cf. Romuald’s “*Sede in cella quasi paradiso*” with *RMac* 6.3: “*Cellam ut paradisum habeas*” (Franklin *et al.* 42).

³²⁷ As Mary Carruthers so beautifully demonstrates, “‘cell’ is not to be taken only literally here” (*Craft* 112). In addition to its mystical significance, the *BR* alludes to mnemotechnic practice, an integral part of the meditation on Scripture intended to lead to contemplation.

you enter farther into it, look back downward and behold how great a world [quanto mondo] I have already set beneath your feet...” (*Par.* 127-9). Besides these obvious points, however, Romuald’s *BR* presents a mnemonically tailored instruction manual on the practice of contemplation itself. The injunctions to watch one’s thoughts (*BR* 3), to recite the Psalms continuously with understanding and concentration (*BR* 4), and to practice the presence of God “with fear and trembling” (*BR* 5) are all part of the traditional monastic practice of contemplation intended to lead toward purity of heart and the vision of God.³²⁸

To conclude, little is usually said about these two silent figures in the commentary tradition or in Dante scholarship generally. Emilio Pasquini observes that in contrast with Damian and Benedict, Macarius and Romuald “remain mere names” in the twenty-second canto.³²⁹ But Romuald’s central place in the new eremiticism of medieval Italy, a movement of tremendous significance well past the beginning of the *Trecento*,³³⁰ as well as the presence of all three Macarii throughout the popular *Vitae Patrum* and its derived *exempla*, assure us they were not mere names in the religious literature and movements of Dante’s time.³³¹ For this reason alone the details of their lives and the monastic rules attributed to them have significance. When St. Benedict indicates these two saints, in an image strikingly similar to his written recommendation of the “Patrum...Vitas” in *RB* 73.5, he seems to gesture toward both the past (Macarius) and future (Romuald) of monasticism.³³² This terse indication of Macarius’s and Romuald’s

³²⁸ See Wong 86-92 and Brown 495-8.

³²⁹ Pasquini, “Canto XXII,” *Paradiso* 3 (2000), 435.

³³⁰ Recall that Leyser refers to Romuald as “the founder” of the new hermit movement (29). As we have seen, Petrarch speaks in the present tense when he praises the orders characteristic of this movement in *De vita solitaria* 2.3.9: “As a sign there still exist sacred convents and devout churches amid the forest caverns,—Cistercium, Maiella, Carthusia, Vallombrosa, Camaldole, and numberless others” (Petrarch 217). Petrarch also includes a rather full account of St. Romuald’s life in *De vita* 2.3.16.

³³¹ Dennis Dutschke has demonstrated the influence of the Egyptian eremitic ideal as embodied by St. Anthony on the mendicant orders in “The Translation of St. Antony from the Egyptian Desert to the Italian City,” *Aevum* 68.3 (1994), 506-10.

³³² While St. Benedict indicates the presence of Macarius and Romuald with words, the use double use of the preposition *qui* (“here”) seems to indicate a tacit “stage direction” like those Antonio Gramsci saw in *Inf.* 10 (“Canto 10 of Dante’s *Inferno* [Prison Notebook 4.78-88],” in Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Vol. 2, ed. & trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg [N.Y.: Columbia U, 2011], 246-58; for an account and assessment, see Frank Rosengarten, “Gramsci’s ‘Little Discovery’: Gramsci’s Interpretation of Canto X of Dante’s *Inferno*,” *boundary* 2 14.3 [1986], 71-90).

presence, and their silent witness to the eremitic nature of the monasticism of Saturn along with their status as perceived founders and rule-givers, have their own significance in the context of the Saturnian atmosphere. Both observe the proper silence of contemplatives as *RMac* 15.8 instructs, and St. Romuald's beautifully terse injunction, "cautiously watching your thoughts [cautus ad cogitationes]" (*BR* 3), invokes the inner aspect of the practice of silence.³³³ In such a demonstrative instance of the silent Saturnine atmosphere, the two abbot-hermits construct the Paradise of Saturn as the monastic cell they both equate it with in their rules.³³⁴

The silence of Macarius and Romuald, however, does not serve the atmosphere of Saturn in merely a general way. The silence and gravity of *Par.* 21-22, the oblique references to the seventh planet and father of the gods, the image of the contemplative ladder and the simile of the jackdaws, the thunderous cry of the contemplatives' judgment, and the pilgrim's analogous judgment as he gazes back through the spheres upon the "little threshing-floor" constitute that atmosphere at its foundations. Meanwhile, Saints Peter Damian and Benedict articulate the atmosphere of Saturn when they describe the loci of the contemplative life in the solitude of the mountainous Italian landscape, always presupposing the lives and writings of those Saturnine law-givers. Finally, the indication of Saints Macarius and Romuald gestures again towards the whole Saturnine context from which Saints Peter Damian and Benedict have emerged to speak to the pilgrim. Just as Rudolf of Camaldoli, in the *Rule* that came to be observed in the various hermitages of St. Romuald's tradition, excuses the "recluses" from participation in the communal office of the other hermits, so these two "contemplative men" continue to participate in the silent worship proper to Saturn's sphere (*Liber eremitice regule* 18).³³⁵ They do not pause in their direct contemplation of God, even to greet Dante the pilgrim who is there to learn from them. For Saturn

The *RB1980* commentary notes that St. Benedict's recommendation of *Vitas Patrum* "probably does not refer to the extensive work known as the *Vitae Patrum*, which was compiled in the course of the sixth century" (*RB1980* 297). Of course, that fact does not preclude the likelihood that medieval readers of *RB* would have thought of the *VP* when they read this passage.

³³³ Franklin *et al.* 45; Brown 488, 489. On the relevance of watching thoughts to the general theme of silence, see Wong 89.

³³⁴ *RMac* 6.3 (Franklin *et al.* 43); *Brief Rule* 1 (Brown 489).

³³⁵ Belisle, *Sources* 238.

teaches the pilgrim above all to be silent before the contemplative vision, and the figures of Macarius and Romuald seem to say along with Abba Pambo concerning Theophilus of Alexandria, “If he is not built up [aedificatur] by my silence [taciturnitate], he will not be edified by my speech [in sermone]” (*VP* 5.15.42).³³⁶ But as much as Pambo’s metaphorical language may remind us of our earlier image of Saturn’s sphere as a rooted structure, that is, a temple, we must not forget that it is at the same time the theatrical backdrop of the pilgrim’s journey, after all, as it says elsewhere in the Sayings, *Peregrinatio est tacere*, “The pilgrimage is to keep silent” (*VP* 7.32.4).³³⁷ Each of our four contemplatives acts in his own way as a guide on that journey.

³³⁶ Ward 81; *PL* 73.961C. Though I refer to the Latin of the *VP*, I have quoted Ward’s English translation from the Greek because it reflects the Latin more literally than does Baker’s online translation of the latter.

³³⁷ *PL* 73.1051C (translation mine).

7.

“why in this wheel the sweet symphony of Paradise is silent”

Conclusion

We have done some heavy work describing and synthesizing the astrological, mythological, and philosophical qualities and associations of Saturn as both planet and divine figure. In the medieval process of assimilating the gods more fully to the planets, Saturn was a figure of many apparently negative associations. Nevertheless, his status as ruler of the Golden Age and the Neoplatonists’ allegorizing of Saturn as a symbol of the contemplative faculty, as well as his associations with solitude, poverty, silence, and religious devotion, offered Dante a planetary figure rich in resonances with more or less eremitical monastic figures like Saints Peter Damian, Benedict, Macarius, and Romuald. In other words, by Dante’s time Saturn had become an appropriate symbol of contemplative monasticism. We have seen how the resulting synthesis of Saturnine qualities was deployed in the various elements of the sphere of Saturn in *Par.* 21 and 22, constituting a Saturnine “climate” or “atmosphere” appropriate to eremitic, contemplative saints. We have seen how St. Peter Damian, the great promoter of the eremitic life in the Middle Ages, serves as the spokesperson and initial embodiment of that atmosphere when Dante the pilgrim first enters the sphere of Saturn in *Par.* 21. Then we have seen how St. Benedict in *Par.* 22 becomes the supreme exemplar of that spirit, such that he constitutes what I have called a *Saturnus redemptus*. Finally, we have considered the all too often neglected figures of Saints Macarius and Romuald and how their silent presence in *Par.* 22 contributes obliquely to the Saturnine atmosphere. The aim throughout has been to delve more deeply than has really ever been done into the significance of Saturn within these cantos.

Obviously, much more along these lines remains to pursue. The nature of contemplation itself and its relation to the Saturn cantos and even to Dante’s own compositional techniques seems like a fertile

subject, as well as a systematic consideration of the possible relevance of melancholy to the Saturnine atmosphere. Much more could be done in the way of a close reading of the texts associated with the four Saturnine figures and their place in the *Commedia*. The seemingly negligible role of Romuald and especially Macarius has resulted in a situation where the appropriate texts are rarely considered at all, and scholars and commentators are more or less content simply to repeat trite observations about the representation of Eastern monasticism in the *collegio* of Saturn's sphere.³³⁸ The question of "which Macarius?" may not even be the right question, but it is hoped that the brief consideration in this thesis of the relevant texts might spur more consideration of the reasons for the inclusion of *a* Macarius. Indeed, I truly much wish that the explorations conducted in this thesis in general might form a stronger basis for much future work on the subject of Dante and Saturn. Finally, it is my hope to apply more in the way of critical theory to the topic of the Saturnine in the *Commedia*. For instance, Walter Benjamin's connection between Saturn and allegory on the one hand, and the much debated question of allegory in the *Commedia* on the other, deserve serious consideration, as—in light of Saturn's association with astronomy and time—do Mikhail Bakhtin's musings on the constitutive properties of space-time in the *Commedia*. The microcosmic temple, cloister, and hermit's cell that we have discerned in Dante's sphere of Saturn turns out to be far greater on the inside than on the outside.

³³⁸ This complacency is surely not altered either by the difficulty of sorting out the persons of and various texts associated with the three Macarii I have examined. Perhaps some of my work will ease the way a bit for Dantistas with a less than absorbing interest in late antique monastic literature.

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Abbreviations:

ABR – *American Benedictine Review*

CWS – *Classics of Western Spirituality*

DOML – *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*

LCL – *Loeb Classical Library*

MLN – *Modern Language Notes*

PL – *Patrologia Latina*

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