Uncovering The Sources: Historical Characters In Dante's Divine Comedy

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Uncovering The Sources: Historical Characters In Dante's Divine Comedy

Abstract
A lack of citation of Dante's specific source material for historical characters who appear in the Divine Comedy is widespread throughout the commentary tradition. I performed a close textual analysis of the Divine Comedy's historical characters, comparing them with the chronicles, annals and histories of Dante's time, using both archival research and secondary histories to do so, and interpreted those primary historical texts as potential sources consulted by Dante. The historical characters I focused on fell into three categories: 1) characters involved in the battles of Montaperti and Colle Val d'Elsa, 2) characters belonging to or associated with the Norman, Swabian and Aragonese dynasties of Sicily, 3) characters embroiled in sensational or newsworthy events during Dante's lifetime. The first two categories analyzed historical events that mostly occurred before Dante was born, and thus focused more heavily on written testimony, while the third category analyzed the news of Dante's adulthood, and thus focused more on oral tradition. Not all of Dante's information could be accounted for, especially as it pertains to the Battle of Montaperti, which introduced a detailed discussion about the role Dante played in shaping history and his complicated authorial relationship to the chronicler Giovanni Villani, who reports all the same information about the battle as Dante. Dante's information on the Sicilian dynasties, however, was almost wholly accounted for and showed a proclivity on the author's part for trusting in Guelph accounts, especially those written by clerics. Finally, plotting the geographic locations of the historical characters involved in newsworthy events during Dante's lifetime revealed that most of what Dante knew did not have to travel far to reach him. Analyzing the text of the Comedy also proved that Dante was relying more heavily on oral rather than written testimony for his information of events that occurred during his lifetime and that Dante's text itself has preserved some of this medieval oral tradition for today's readers.

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UNCOVERING THE SOURCES:
HISTORICAL CHARACTERS IN DANTE’S DIVINE COMEDY

Vanessa Noelle DiMaggio

A DISSERTATION

in

Italian Studies

For the Graduate Group in Romance Languages

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in

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To Matthew, my love, for believing in me, supporting me and acknowledging me as the smartest doctor in the family
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sisters, my sweet B and, most of all, my husband, Matt. A special thanks to my second and third authors, respectively, Sneffels and Elbert. Your paws definitely did not get in the way of my typing.
UNCOVERING THE SOURCES:
HISTORICAL CHARACTERS IN DANTE’S *DIVINE COMEDY*

Vanessa DiMaggio

Eva Del Soldato

A lack of citation of Dante’s specific source material for historical characters who appear in the *Divine Comedy* is widespread throughout the commentary tradition. I performed a close textual analysis of the *Divine Comedy*’s historical characters, comparing them with the chronicles, annals and histories of Dante’s time, using both archival research and secondary histories to do so, and interpreted those primary historical texts as potential sources consulted by Dante. The historical characters I focused on fell into three categories: 1) characters involved in the battles of Montaperti and Colle Val d’Elsa, 2) characters belonging to or associated with the Norman, Swabian and Aragonese dynasties of Sicily, 3) characters embroiled in sensational or newsworthy events during Dante’s lifetime. The first two categories analyzed historical events that mostly occurred before Dante was born, and thus focused more heavily on written testimony, while the third category analyzed the news of Dante’s adulthood, and thus focused more on oral tradition. Not all of Dante’s information could be accounted for, especially as it pertains to the Battle of Montaperti, which introduced a detailed discussion about the role Dante played in shaping history and his complicated authorial relationship to the chronicler Giovanni Villani, who reports all the same information about the battle as Dante. Dante’s information on the Sicilian dynasties, however, was almost wholly accounted for and showed a proclivity on the author’s part for trusting in Guelph accounts, especially those written by clerics. Finally, plotting the geographic locations of the historical characters involved in newsworthy events during Dante’s lifetime revealed that most of what Dante knew did not have to travel far to reach him. Analyzing the text of the *Comedy* also proved that Dante was relying more heavily on oral rather than written testimony for his information of events that occurred during his lifetime and that Dante’s text itself has preserved some of this medieval oral tradition for today’s readers.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENT ............................................................................................... iii

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2: THE BATTLES WITH SIENA ............................................................... 43

CHAPTER 3: THE SICILIAN DYNASTIES .............................................................. 109

CHAPTER 4: HOW DANTE GOT HIS NEWS ......................................................... 175

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................... 222
CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In 1918, Dorothy Lister Simons performed an exhaustive inventory of all of the individual characters in the *Divine Comedy*.¹ Simons wanted to emphasize the vastness of Dante’s knowledge of history, legend and news. She counted 332 individual characters assigned to the three realms of the afterlife. Of these 332 characters, 253 were real, historic people, 160 of whom—*nearly half*—lived between the 11th and 14th centuries.² Even more pertinent to the present study, nearly one-third of all the characters in the *Divine Comedy* were active just preceding or during Dante’s lifetime.

Dante’s breadth of knowledge of current and recent events, as well as of Greek and Roman history, raises the question: Was Dante a historian? And if not a historian in the modern sense of the word, what exactly was his “vision” of history? W.H.V. Reade, back in 1939, was the first *dantista* to use the word “vision” to describe Dante’s conception of God’s providential plan in history.³ Reade warned scholars not to consider Dante a proper historian, because the poet’s naïve use of authorities, his scarce knowledge of history, and his failure to distinguish between reliable and unreliable statements made it impossible to recognize in his writing a formal philosophy of history that we might get from a modern scholar.⁴ Charles T. Davis, writing 45 years later, also used the term “vision” to describe Dante’s view of history, but not because he didn’t think Dante’s ideology was rational enough to be called a philosophy. Davis preferred the term because it emphasized “the immediacy and intensity of Dante’s perception of God’s

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² The rest of the *Divine Comedy*’s characters fall into the categories of Biblical figures and characters from Greek and Roman legend, as well as from other literary genres.
⁴ Ibid, 188.
providence acting through his chosen people… the Romans.”

He seconds Reade’s determination that Dante was not a historian as we understand the term today, writing: “He was, of course, no historian in the sense of trying to piece together bits of information to give a careful and critical account of a series of events.”

It must be said that in the 13th and 14th centuries, however, though chronicle writing was flourishing, history was not yet a recognized field of research. In fact, according to John Barnes, full-blown “history” is typically considered to start in the 15th century. In the Middle Ages, the words *history, chronicle* and *annals* were mostly used interchangeably, with little distinction between them. A history as we know it today would be written at one time and would narrate events selectively in the service of a clear theme. That contrasts with a chronicle, which typically would be written as a series of year-by-year entries and rather than narrating events selectively, it would narrate them haphazardly. But of course the historical writing of the 13th and 14th centuries never fit so neatly inside of those categories. Many of them lay inside the gray area between chronicle and history. The authors who refer to their works as “historiae” do not necessarily ditch the chronological order of a chronicle but rather adopt a chronology of a wider knit or perhaps organize their events by topic rather than year. Rather than stop at the simple reportage of an event, they might also investigate the causes and connections of events. Perhaps the word that best describes what a chronicle is *supposed* to be is

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6 Ibid, 23.


really annals, as they always respect the organization of yearly entries and tend to keep
the reporting quite succinct without going into much detail. Annals tended to be open
works that were taken over by various authors, while chronicle writers would sit down at
a certain moment in time with a predetermined organization in mind, particularly when
they wanted to start and when they wanted to end.

In her book *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, Janet Coleman describes how a
typical medieval “historian” would study and write about the past.⁹ She argues that
medieval writers wrote about history as an exercise in oratory, à la Cicero. According to
Coleman, it is the rhetorician who interprets the past for its present applicability and
draws universal, exemplary lessons from historical events. The historian, on the other
hand, records events faithfully, in chronological order; he does not interpret his
experiences nor does he draw lessons from them. Coleman says that medieval men found
the mere “facts” of the historical record useless unless they could be interpreted for
present intelligibility.¹⁰

One might argue that Dante perfectly fits the mold of the medieval version of the
historian, looking to the past as a way to inform his understanding of the present. By
studying imperial history, Dante determined that the Roman Empire, which he believed
to be ordained by special acts of Providence, could solve the political problems of his
age. Nicolai Rubinstein has stated that “the beginnings of political thought are always
closely related to the awakening of the interest in history, and, in the early periods of
society, interest in the past appears to be inseparable from the observation of existing

¹⁰ Ibid, 558.
conditions.” Thus, Dante’s vision of history is inextricably linked to his political vision. A. Passerin d’Entrèves, in his book *Dante as a Political Thinker*, argues that Dante did not derive his political beliefs from mere nostalgia for the past nor from reading philosophical texts but rather from his meticulous assessment of historical evidence. He believes that Dante first encountered the empire when reading Roman law and that by reading Virgil, Dante learned that the time of Christ and the time of Augustus were linked. For Dante, only an Italy unified under the rule of an empire, whose power was completely independent from the church, could find peace again and experience the “vita felice” the way she had experienced it during Virgil’s age.

Davis says that Dante’s vision of history both looks to the past, when the empire was all-powerful and the church was poor and apostolic, and also looks to a future when that “buon tempo antico” would be restored under the long-prophesied ruler, the second Augustus, the veltro, who would reinstate peace. Joan Ferrante’s study *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* argues convincingly that Dante’s political views in the *Monarchia* (namely that temporal power should belong to the emperor; spiritual power to the pope) are consistent with his views in the *Comedy*, but that by expressing them in poetry, Dante is able to put them forth far more forcefully. Dante, Ferrante argues, is translating a historical conflict into potent poetic images. Both Dante’s political and historical visions involve, above all else, an indestructible empire ordained by God for the welfare of man.

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13 *Dante’s Italy*, 40.
Because of the fervent interest in understanding Dante’s political views, scholars have never neglected to study Dante’s knowledge of the ancient world, to the point where little remains to be discussed. Dante himself professes to have read Paulus Orosius’ *History Against the Pagans* (*Par.* 10.119-120) and Livy’s *History of Rome* (*Inf.* 28.12 and *Monarchia* II, 3). Scholars such as Barnes, Robert Davidsohn and Davis are also convinced that Dante may have developed some of his political ideas after hearing sermons from Fra Remigio de’ Girolami, who was a Dominican lector at Santa Maria Novella at the end of the 13th century. In 1297, Girolami wrote *Contra falsos ecclesie professores*, in which he argues for the theoretical supremacy of the spiritual power while attempting to restrict the Church’s temporal jurisdiction. Davis finds many similarities between Dante and Girolami’s political and historical arguments, especially as it concerns their idealization of Rome.

Another historical source scholars seem convinced that Dante used is Riccobaldo da Ferrara’s chronicle, *Historie*. Aldo Massèra, in his article “Dante e Riccobaldo da Ferrara,” argues that Dante derived his knowledge about Guido da Montefeltro, the murder of Obizzo d’Este and possibly Pope Martin IV’s love of eels and wine from Riccobaldo’s chronicle. A.T. Hankey finds further possible borrowings by Dante from Riccobaldo in her compendium of the *Historie, Riccobaldo ferrariensis: Compendium*

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16 Dante’s *Italy*
Davis, on the other hand, hinges his argument that Dante had read the *Historie* on similarities between Dante and Riccobaldo’s descriptions of the *buon tempo antico*. According to Davis, Dante’s placing Florence’s *buon tempo antico* earlier than that of other Florentine writers, in the 12th century, before the murder of Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti and the rise of the Guelph and Ghibelline parties, and emphasizing the city’s poverty and small population size as well as its austere lifestyle in *Paradiso* 17 directly recalls Riccobaldo’s famous comparison between the frugal customs of Italy during Frederick II’s reign and the decadence of the early 14th century. “It is not unlikely that Riccobaldo’s passage served as a basis for Dante’s whole description of life in twelfth-century Florence, transformed though it was by his knowledge of Florentine traditions and by his poetic genius.”

Something Dante scholars have always been careful to note about Dante’s study of history is that he did not necessarily distinguish between legend and history, as some of what passed for history during his time was mythical. To Dante, a story was a story, whether it was the fiction of a poet or the historic record of a chronicler. Reade says that while Dante may have recognized a distinction between history and fiction, “he failed to understand how deeply the practice of allegorizing may strike at the roots of that distinction.” Thus, Dante believed the content of the *Aeneid* to be historically true and accepted Virgil as his supreme authority on pagan Roman history. For Giuseppe Mazzotta and Charles Singleton, Dante’s sense of history is grounded in the biblical

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19 Ibid, 89.
20 Ibid, 92.
21 See, for example, St. Augustine’s views on universal history in *The City of God*.
22 *Dante’s Vision*, 189-190.
experience, as the crucial structure that sustains the Divine Comedy is the story of
Exodus. Throughout the Middle Ages, events from the Bible were written about in
universal histories with the same historical truth-value as the deeds of Holy Roman
emperors and popes. Ferrante, in her article “History is Myth, Myth is History,” states
that Dante treats figures from myth and history with equal authenticity, because they are
both a part of human culture and therefore human history.

The discussion about Dante’s use of historical sources cannot move forward
without first resolving one of the biggest dilemmas in this field of research: the influence
of the Villani and Malispini chronicles on Dante’s Comedy or vice versa. Fortunately,
scholars have heavily and thoroughly debated this topic for years now and have all but
solved the mystery—especially as it regards Malispini. For many years, the Malispini
chronicle was thought to be a genuine 13th-century text written by a noble Guelf named
Ricordano Malispini and continued by his nephew Giacotto. Its authenticity was first
called into question, however, by Paul Scheffer-Boichorst in 1870. Scheffer-Boichorst
accused Malispini of being a 14th-century compiler who borrowed material from Villani
and inserted eulogies of certain Florentine families into it. His flaw, however, was using
only printed editions instead of manuscripts. Scheffer-Boichorst’s theory was
strengthened by Carlo Cipolla and Vittorio Rossi, who demonstrated that a certain

passage in Malispini could not have been written before 1318, and by Vittorio Lami, who believed that Malispini’s source was a compendium of Villani, manuscript BNF 2.1.252. Rafaello Morghen, however, tried to revive the Malispini chronicle’s authenticity by arguing that Villani very well could have corrected and expanded Malispini’s chronicle, comparing Malispini to other sources and filling out his quotations.

Morghen put forth four arguments to make his case, but in 1964 Charles Davis, in his essay “The Malispini Question,” refuted each and every one rather convincingly. Morghen’s arguments and Davis’ refutation of them are as follows: 1) A scandalous passage about Aquinas, which Villani shortens, could not have been written after his canonization in 1323; Davis finds manuscript versions of Villani where that passage was not suppressed, 2) Malispini served as Dante’s main historical source, which is confirmed by numerous parallel passages between the Malispini chronicle and the *Divine Comedy*; Davis points out that these passages also appear in Villani and nowhere is there an absolutely clear verbal link between Malispini and Dante as opposed to Villani and Dante, 3) Malispini, a man of an earlier century, shows an aristocratic spirit foreign to the bourgeois Villani; Davis says Malispini emphasizes the antiquity and high status of merchant as well as noble families, 4) The errors and peculiarities of the three most important Malispini manuscripts were present in an archetype between the existing manuscripts and the autograph. Thus, the autograph could not have been written later

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than the earliest years of the 14th century; Davis shows that the oldest manuscript contains a passage that asserts that Sulla was the first founder of Florence. This theory was first formulated by Coluccio Salutati, who derived it from a humanistic study of classical sources at the end of the 14th century and made it public only in 1403.

Davis thus seemingly ended the argument with his article, which proved that the Malispini chronicle was in fact a late 14th-century forgery copied from an anonymous abridgement of Villani’s *Nuova cronica* and the first 41 chapters of the *Libro fiesolano* (an Italian rewriting of the *Chronica de origine civitatis*), with insertions, alterations and omissions designed to exalt certain Florentine families, notably the Bonaguisi. Several scholars backed up Davis’ assertions in the years to follow, effectively ending the debate.

Unraveling the mystery of whether Dante influenced Villani or the other way around, however, is a much more complicated matter. Carlo Cipolla and Vittorio Rossi first argued that it was necessary to presuppose the existence of a common source between Dante and Villani. They believed that Dante must have utilized a vernacular chronicle similar to, but not identified with, Villani’s *Nuova Cronica* and that Villani himself followed this unknown source very closely, adding further details and his own comments. They based their theory on two chapters of Villani’s chronicle: chapter 9 and

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41 of book VII, concerning the deaths of King Enzo and Manfred respectively. They admitted the validity of their findings was limited to those passages only. But Fernando Neri opposed this theory and instead insisted that Villani’s interpretation of history derives from Dante’s; he not only depended on Dante for historical judgments and information but supplemented those borrowings the same way he supplemented other sources, by means of additional research.  

Giovanni Aquilecchia took to the task of sorting out Villani and Dante’s influences on each other in 1965, arguing that one cannot definitively solve the problem without knowing the precise date of composition of the two works. We know very little about the chronology of their composition, besides when they were completed—the *Comedy* by 1321 and the *Cronica* by 1348. Giorgio Petrocchi dates the *Inferno*’s composition to 1304-08, the *Purgatorio*’s composition to 1308-12 and the *Paradiso*’s composition to 1316-1321. He also believes Dante revised the first two canticas between 1313 and 1315, before publishing them. Aquilecchia notes that all we know for certain is that the *Inferno* was so well known by 1317 that it was quoted by heart, while we have similar evidence for the *Purgatorio* by 1319. Aquilecchia points out that if Villani’s *Cronica* was not started before 1320, Dante could not have used it as a source for the *Comedy* and it would be equally absurd to suppose Villani did not utilize Dante’s *Comedy*. However, since we don’t know when Villani began composing his *Cronica*, Aquilecchia does not rule out the possibility that at least the beginning of Villani’s...

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36 Ibid, 36-37.
Cronica was composed when the Comedy had not yet become known. In Aquilecchia writes, “At this present stage of research, neither the hypothesis of a common tradition nor the possibility that Dante might have known at least the first Book of Villani’s Chronicle can be altogether dismissed.”

In his 1972 book Chronicle into History, Louis Green gave his opinion on the issue. Green took the approach of looking at the differences between Villani’s and Dante’s viewpoints, namely that Villani’s interpretation of history lacked the clear imperialist bias of Dante’s presentation of the political issues of his age. For example, Frederick II and his son Manfred are clearly presented as the archetypes of worldly evil in Villani, while they receive a much gentler treatment in the Comedy. Green believes that Villani and Dante drew their facts from the same body of written records and oral traditions, but presented them differently. He agrees that Villani must have been familiar with the Divine Comedy when he composed his work as it now stands, as is evident from his borrowing of certain Dantean turns of phrase and metaphorical expressions as well as some of Dante’s judgments on particular situations. Green lists out Villani’s sources for certain books and sections with certainty—a vernacular version of the Chronica de origine civitatis, Martin of Troppau’s Chronicon, the Gesta Florentinorum. What is unclear to him is how much of the provenance of Villani’s information on the early history of Florence is bound up with the Divine Comedy. He believes it more plausible to assume a common source from which both Dante and Villani drew their information than to posit Villani’s derivation from the scattered allusions in the Divine Comedy for his

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37 Ibid, 44.
39 Green, Chronicle into History.
40 Green gives Dante’s comment on the humiliation of Pope Boniface VIII at Anagni as an example.
historic narrative.\footnote{Ibid, 157.} But for Green, the question of whether Villani borrowed from Dante, Dante borrowed from Villani, or if they both borrowed from another source is ultimately unanswerable because we don’t know when Villani first started preparatory work on his chronicle, when he started keeping a regular account of events, and when he cast the work we now have in its final form. All we know for sure is that Villani could not have begun the version of the \emph{Cronica} that we now have today earlier than the 1320s, and it may date to as late as the 1340s. But before one assumes that the bulk of his chronicle was written in the 1330s or 1340s, one must admit that the detail with which he describes the events of books VIII, IX and X could not have been produced from memory decades after the events occurred. Thus, Green believes that there must have been some preliminary note-taking years before he crystalized the final version of his text.

Davis, whose research we have to thank for debunking Malispini, believed the answer to the question lay in the concept of the \emph{buon tempo antico}.\footnote{Davis, Charles T. “Il Buon Tempo Antico.” \emph{Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence}. Ed. Rubinstein, Nicolai, London, Faber and Faber, 1968, pp. 45-69. Reprinted in \emph{Dante’s Italy}, pp. 71-93.} He believed that the idea to place the \emph{buon tempo antico} during a period of austerity and modest communal life before Florentine expansion belonged to Dante, as it was an essential part of his theory of history and society.\footnote{Ibid, 93.} He asserted that Villani had most certainly read the \emph{Comedy} before producing a final version of even the first part of his chronicle.\footnote{Ibid, 76.} Of the \emph{buon tempo antico}, Davis writes, “It was created by a poet, adapted by a chronicler, and reiterated weakly and briefly by two compilers.”\footnote{Dante’s Italy, 93.}
In 1994, Thomas Maissen added to the growing evidence that Villani borrowed from Dante but not the other way around in his article about the confusion of the name Totila and Atilla in Florentine foundational myths. Maissen spends the majority of his article sorting out the misattribution of Attila, ruler of the Huns, rather than Totila, king of the Ostrogoths, as the one who destroyed Florence. But Maissen’s most convincing argument comes from whom Villani and Dante think re-founded Florence. Villani attributes that deed to Charlemagne. Maissen finds it unthinkable that Dante, whose esteem for the empire and especially for Charlemagne, would have denounced Charlemagne as the re-founder of Florence: “Il fatto è che il poeta non conosceva questa leggenda, che non poteva ancora conoscerla, così come la ignoravano i suoi predecessori duecenteschi, fossero poeti o cronisti.” The reason he did not tell the story of Charlemagne’s Christian, imperial re-foundation of the city of Florence is not because he knew the legend but dismissed it but because this myth was only introduced into the history of Florence after Dante, and it was Villani who did it.

In recent years, several other scholars have confirmed Villani’s dependence on Dante, including Paula Clarke, who states that Villani had clearly read Dante’s works, especially the *Comedy*, which was coming out as he was writing his chronicle and which he quotes in the last portion of his work. Jeffrey Schnapp concurs, citing Villani’s habit of compiling and paraphrasing secondary sources, whether literary texts like Dante’s

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Comedy or actual chronicles, making Dante’s dependence on him highly unlikely.⁴⁹ Still, to this day, all that can be said with certainty about Dante and Villani is that Villani most certainly had read the Comedy and quoted from it by the time he finished editing his Nuova Cronica and the likelihood that Dante had read an early, first draft of Villani’s chronicle before it was altered to its present form is highly unlikely and unsubstantiated by any real textual evidence.⁵⁰

Another essential field of study regarding Dante’s historical sources that has been active with research is the relationship between the Divine Comedy and the early Florentine chronicles. Aquilecchia wrote, “If we could solve the problem of this relationship we should be able to assess more correctly Dante’s originality in the framework of contemporary political thought; we should also have a better understanding of his attitude towards the historiographic tradition, and we should be able to define more clearly his own influence on contemporary chroniclers.”⁵¹ The possible sources that Dante depended on for his knowledge of Florentine history include the Chronica de origine civitatis (written before 1231 by an anonymous author),⁵² the Gesta Florentinorum (written by Sanzanome probably before 1230),⁵³ the Gesta Florentinorum (written by an anonymous author, not to be confused with the Gesta written by the author

⁵⁰ Nicolai Rubinstein puts forth the hypothesis that Dante may have known at least Villani’s first book in “The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence: A Study in Mediaeval Historiography.” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, vol. 5, 1942, pp. 198-227.
⁵¹ “Dante and the Florentine Chroniclers,” 30.
⁵³ Ibid, 1-34.
ironically named Sanzanome),\textsuperscript{54} and the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle (written by an anonymous author).\textsuperscript{55}

The *Chronica de origine civitatis* enjoyed a huge success as the main source for the early history of Florence throughout the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries. We know that Villani relied on it almost exclusively. It’s unclear whether the version that has come down to us was compiled all at once or whether it is based partly on earlier compilations that have been lost. It is very similar to the *Gesta Florentinorum* by Sanzanome in that its main motif deals with the antagonism between Florence and nearby Fiesole and the importance attributed to the Roman descent of the Florentines. It covers the years 1125-1231, though it skips 1208-1219, and tells the story of Florence’s legendary founding by Julius Caesar after the Roman sack of Fiesole, which was settled by Catiline after his failed attempt at revolution in 65 BC, making Fiesole an anti-Roman city. The narrative then follows the story of Florence’s rebirth as a second Christian Rome after its legendary destruction by Totila, King of the Ostrogoths, (often confused with Atilla the Hun). It ends with a final destruction of Fiesole by the Florentines (a historical event that actually occurred in 1125) and a wave of Fiesolan immigration into Florence. The *Chronica de origine civitatis* was most certainly known in one of its various Latin and Italian translations (the *Libro fiesolano* the most well-known among them)\textsuperscript{56} to Dante, who Aquilecchia, Barnes and Schnapp all agree had read it. Schnapp, however, is cautious to point out that it was


\textsuperscript{56} Hartwig, Otto. *Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Ältesten Geschichte Der Stadt Florenz*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Marburg, N.G. Elwert, 1875, pp. 35-65. It’s printed in its entirety as a footnote to the *Chronica de origine civitatis*. 

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in no sense an authoritative text for Dante, as he “freely modified, adapted and even undermined, to better suit the Commedia’s literary and political ends.”

These legends about the origins of the city of Florence and its rivalry with neighboring Fiesole were a well-known popular tradition to literate and illiterate medieval Florentines alike. They were, in a sense, public knowledge—constantly appropriated, adapted, altered and added to by other historians and compilers. Green has stated that because the chronicles of this time tended to utilize elements from the same store of information just in different combinations, it’s virtually impossible to determine where any one historical fact was first recorded. We don’t know the Florentine chroniclers’ original sources—their information may have reached them by oral tradition or they may have had access to records that are now lost.

Fortunately, Barnes set to the task of determining whether there was any evidence for each specific chronicle mentioned above having had an influence on Dante’s Comedy for the book Dante in Context. Regarding Sanzanome’s Gesta, it has been suggested that Dante’s reference to Florence in Convivio 1.3.4 as “la bellissima e famosissima filia di Roma” elaborates Sanzanome’s statement, “Nobilissima civitas florentina… patrum est huc usque secuta vestigia.” However, Barnes finds this evidence inconclusive and says that it’s unwise to insist on a verbal debt on Dante’s part to Sanzanome. Nonetheless, Barnes does finds a striking resemblance between Cacciaguida’s speech in Paradiso 16 in which Cacciaguida names seven different places acquired by Florence with its expansion into the contado and the content of Sanzanome’s chronicle, which lists those same seven places.

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57 Transfiguration of History, footnote on p. 42.
58 Chronicle into History, 161.
59 Barnes, “Historical and Political Writing.”
Barnes finds evidence both in support of and in doubt of Dante’s having read the chronicle known as the pseudo-Brunetto Latini. He finds it somewhat unlikely that Dante read the chronicle because the autograph manuscript continues the narrative down to 1303, and there are earlier passages that must have been written in 1303 or later, which makes it questionable whether Dante could have read the chronicle before leaving Florence in 1301.\textsuperscript{60} The chronicle also does not have a great deal to add to what earlier texts could have taught Dante about Florentine history. However, the one event it covers that other chronicles are missing is a very full account of the Buondelmonte murder in 1216.\textsuperscript{61} Dante believed that the murder of Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti gave rise to the factional strife between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Florence and thus was at the root of his own exile in 1302. He mentions the murder indirectly in \textit{Inferno} 28 with the indictment of Mosca degli Uberti who advised the murder of Buondelmonte, “che fu mal seme per la gente toscana” (108).

After surveying the contents of all the early Florentine chronicles, Barnes finds many pieces of information found in the \textit{Divine Comedy} still lacking a confirmed source.\textsuperscript{62} Barnes asks if the surviving written sources fully account for Dante’s knowledge of Florentine history or whether the original source of that information has now been lost or simply reached Dante by word of mouth. Barnes’ conclusion is as follows: “… the surviving thirteenth-century sources account for Dante’s knowledge of Florentine history rather most satisfactorily than might be imagined, but that one of his

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 109-110.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 111.
\textsuperscript{62} For an extremely detailed survey of all of the historical information we still lack sources for in Dante’s \textit{Comedy}, see pp. 113-114 of Barnes.
sources is missing: some account, whether official or otherwise, of the composition of the more prominent classes in Florentine society, continues to elude us.”

The *Divine Comedy* is replete with references to historical events and news, but the events rarely stand by themselves; they are instead tied to the actions of the individuals who set them in motion. Dante uses his historical knowledge to concentrate heavily on particular real individuals and the choices they made in life. Dante’s gallery of historical portraits cover the whole of human existence, from Adam and Eve to his friends and contemporaries, whose personal experiences exemplify what constitutes good and evil and the role we play in the society we make.

As Santagata states in his biography of Dante, “… no other works of fiction in the medieval period record facts of contemporary history, politics, and intellectual and social life in such a systematic, immediate and detailed manner—and, moreover, without being afraid to use background details heard only through rumor or what today we would call political and social gossip.” Readers of the *Comedy* could recognize in Dante’s souls of the afterlife the many figures who had died recently or in some cases were still very much alive. Many of the historical facts Dante used, because they were inspired by recent events, could only be easily understood at or near the time of their occurrence. This choice of Dante’s ran the risk of his poem very quickly becoming dated, incomprehensible, or, worse, inconsequential. So why then, did Dante endeavor to keep up with the news knowing that the text would be read after that news was no longer relevant? Santagata believes it’s because as he was writing, Dante gave readings to a

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keen and limited audience, one that was “in the know,” and included political messages in his book that would be pronounced as the events happened.65

Dante may have selected so many real individual characters to incorporate into his poem because he was influenced by the tradition of the social chronicle, which gave information about various families’ antiquity, current social standing, place of residence and coat of arms. J. K. Hyde studied Italian social chronicles extensively, establishing them as a legitimate literary genre.66 The oldest example he was able to find is the *De Generatione aliquorum civium Urbis Padue, tam nobelium, quam ignobilium* by Giovanni da Nono. It describes the fortunes of more than 100 Paduan families and is divided into four books: the first deals with the three great families who dominated Paduan politics in the 13th century; the second contains ancient noble families, many of whom were in decline; the third was dedicated to respected families whose nobility was in doubt; the fourth dealt with non-nobles, mostly *popolani*.

Hyde describes the *De Generatione* as the “only Italian social chronicle of the medieval period.”67 His search for other examples from that period in Italy did not yield substantial results. Hyde says that if any city were a prime location for the social chronicle tradition to emerge, it would be Florence. Florence had families of differing origins living in close proximity, social distinctions that were sharpened by political competition, and a lively literary tradition. Hyde declares that the closest approach to a social chronicle in the medieval period outside of Padua is *Paradiso* 16, Cacciaguida’s speech. “The information given concerning families, their origins and relationships, city

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and country houses and coats of arms, is the typical subject matter of the social
cronicle." Dante also divides these families up in a similar fashion to da Nono: those
already in decline in Cacciaguida’s day, those at the height of their power, and those
whose rise was recent. Hyde thinks there’s no reason to believe da Nono had read
Dante’s work or vice versa, but “… both independently perceived and recorded the
material and social change which was the most striking and disturbing feature of the life
of the cities they knew.”

The question remains: Why would Dante focus so intensely on telling (or
*retelling*) the true stories of real individuals whose lives he heard about or read about?
Why would he make them the main protagonists of his poem? Mazzotta maintains that
history for Dante cannot be a study of personalities but that he uses individual lives and
history to “vitality reenact and partake in the paradigmatic story of Exodus.” Passerin
D’Entrèves maintains that Dante uses the experiences of real historical characters to
express abstract arguments, especially as they pertain to political controversies. He
believes that through a re-examination of historical evidence, Dante discovered a new
meaning in history symbolized by the protagonists of history themselves. Another
possible inspiration is the literary form of the “novelle,” which first developed in
Florence and at first just referred to extraordinary or noteworthy news. Later, the term
“novella” referred to narrations about interesting facts, whether they were true or
invented. Written collections of “novelle” went into circulation in the last decade of the
13th century, and the demand for them was great. The oldest collection of anecdotes,

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68 Ibid, 125.
69 Ibid, 126.
70 *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 5. This theory is supported by the temporal setting of the poem: Easter.
71 *Dante as a Political Thinker*, 7.
stories and facts about famous people is the anonymous “Novellino,” which used to be called “Le Novelle Antiche” and covers the lives of emperors (especially Frederick II), grandi signori, princes and knights.\textsuperscript{72}

Joan Ferrante believes it was important to Dante to incorporate real people into his narrative because he considered them to be eyewitnesses to history. Many serious historians, including Orosius and Bede, claim to rely on passed-down testimony of eyewitnesses to write history because they were considered the most authoritative testimony of all. “Dante, one might say, used his vision to interview a series of eyewitnesses of contemporary and past history, in order to fill in details that other histories did not give, or correct some they did.”\textsuperscript{73} By putting the narrations of historic events in the mouths of eyewitnesses who were directly involved, Dante suggests the authenticity of his own narration.\textsuperscript{74} Ferrante also points out that sometimes Dante either supplies explanations that historical sources don’t corroborate or makes them up for his own personal or political ends, such as when he says Manfred converted right before his death in order to teach a lesson about God’s mercy.\textsuperscript{75} Dante is writing history to teach a particular lesson or to further a particular cause. Ferrante cautions that while we do not need to assume Dante had a source for all of his historical information, because he is using history, “we do need to identify his sources and verify the authenticity of his stories, whenever possible, in order to understand how and to what end Dante is manipulating them.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72} Sicardi, Enrico. \textit{Il Novellino e altre novelle antiche}. Biblioteca di classici italiani commentati per le scuole. Livorno, R. Giusti, 1919.
\textsuperscript{73} Ferrante, “History is Myth,” 322.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 328.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 330.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 333.
Of course, Dante also uses his real characters to convey a message about personal salvation. According to the *Comedy*, every action and failure to act has its repercussions and its consequences on other individuals and on society as a whole. Ferrante points out that Dante’s Hell is filled with sinners who were in a position to influence others, and in one way or another they all failed. She even posits the idea that Dante’s concept of Hell as a gallery of real people and their crimes draws inspiration from the contemporary practice of painting portraits of criminals on public buildings.

Dante immortalized in his poem 253 such real individuals, which means he had to have been an extremely voracious reader of the chronicles of his time. To set in ink the lives and stories of that many historic people, especially people who lived and died before his lifetime, Dante had to be paying attention to history in a way that was beyond the average Florentine of his time. But why was Dante reading so much about history? What was he searching for? What question did he want answered?

One cannot begin to discuss this topic without first addressing the debate about whether the *Comedy* is an allegory of the theologians or an allegory of the poets, a debate that has received much scholarly attention dating all the way back to the publication of the poem. Early commentators claimed that Dante’s poem was essentially a *fabula*, just the purely fictitious imaginings of the poet, a text that mimed reality but had no claim on being historically true. This was perhaps out of fear that Dante would be charged with heresy for presenting his journey as true. Proponents of the allegory of theologians, on the other hand, most notably Charles Singleton, argue that the literal sense of the *Divine*

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77 *Political Vision*, 132.
78 Ibid, 135.
Comedy should be accepted as historically true as it is grounded in history.\textsuperscript{79} Singleton famously wrote, “The fiction of the Divine Comedy is that it is not a fiction.”\textsuperscript{80} The debate took shape in the form of attacks on whether the Epistle to Cangrande is real or not. In the letter (if Dante wrote it), he refers to the literal sense of the poem as historialis and claims he wrote his Comedy in imitation of God’s way of writing, like Scripture, as a sort of appendix to the Bible.

Both Teodolinda Barolini and Mazzotta have tried to come to grips with Dante’s authorial claims in light of the debate between the allegory of the theologians and the allegory of the poets, and both don’t see the problem as black and white.\textsuperscript{81} According to Barolini, Dante used poetic and narrative strategies to paint a vision he believed to be true, creating a hybrid truth that has the face of a lie.\textsuperscript{82} She said we can only move on to the consequences of this truth claim if we accept that Dante “intends to represent his fiction as credible, believable, true.”\textsuperscript{83} Mazzotta, meanwhile, approaches the issue from what he calls “the historicity of interpretation.” That is, the distinction between poetic and theological allegory depends on an act of interpretation, which unfolds in the process of reading. “… Reading is an imaginary operation in which truth and fiction, far from being mutually exclusive categories, are simultaneously engendered by the ambiguous

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Undivine Comedy}, 11.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 13.
structure of metaphoric language." Mazzotta lobbies for not repressing the textual ambiguities of the *Comedy* or espousing a fixed and stable meaning for the poem. He thinks it makes no difference whether we speak of Dante’s poem as fiction or truth, because Dante abolishes the boundaries between theology and poetry and carves out his own literary space.

The debate between the allegory of theologians versus poets is relevant to Dante’s committed effort to filling his narrative with real individuals, because if he truly wanted to represent his work as literally true, a continuation of the Bible, then it would be important for him to populate his world with people whose existence was literally true as well. And the only way to learn about these people and their lives was to commit to the act of studying them, of reading histories. However, that may not have been his only motivation for paying such close attention to history. In Dante’s time, the popularity of astrology coupled with the idea of fortune created a predisposition of belief in recurrent cycles of history. That is, that history was a sequence of rises and falls. The religious climate contributed to seeing said rises and falls as either punishments or favors given out by God in recognition of a society’s virtue or vice. As a Christian thinker, Dante believed that Divine Providence was guiding history. The divine plan was unfolding within history, and if you paid enough attention, you could decipher the pattern or logic of said plan and perhaps even predict the future. Dante believed, above all, that this providential plan was focused on the Roman people and that the Roman Empire was providentially ordained.

Scholars have begun more and more to view the *Divine Comedy* as a prophetic book and to look into the possible sources for the more esoteric sides of Dante’s thought.

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One of the best pieces of scholarship on that topic comes from Marjorie Reeves, who explored the relationship between Dante’s prophecies and those of Joachim of Fiore. Reeves understands that Dante believes that he can attempt, by paying attention to clues, to read the signs set in history that will reveal the whole divine plan, including how it will all end. She points out that from Dante’s prophecies in the *Comedy* concerning the *veltro* and the 515, it’s obvious Dante expected a second “right moment” in the future that would parallel the first “right moment” under Augustus. This is different than the widely known prophecies back then that there would be a Last World Emperor followed by the Antichrist and then the second coming and Last Judgment. Dante’s prophecy meant that at some point in the future human society would experience a new, elevated quality of living, one that was characterized above all by peace. Reeves investigates whether this continuing hope for a transformation of human society was directly or indirectly inspired by the Joachimist expectation of the Third Age. Dante does include Joachim among the blessed spirits in the heaven of the sun. They shared a similarity in their patterns of history, i.e. the first right moment being the reign of Augustus, a middle advent shortly followed by the final second coming. They also, as Reeves writes, “shared the sense that to those who reflected deeply on the meaning of events in time, might be given the spiritual vision to interpret their full significance and the responsibility to declare their message in prophetic terms.” In the end, Reeves determines that all we can say for sure is that an ambience of prophetic expectation had been created by Joachim’s disciples and

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86 Ibid, 54.
was prevalent during Dante’s lifetime and that Dante’s prophetic vision seems to belong to this mode of thought.\textsuperscript{87}

As mentioned earlier, about half of the characters that appear in Dante’s \textit{Divine Comedy} were real people who lived between the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Of those, 62 can be said with certainty to have lived during Dante’s adulthood.\textsuperscript{88} This means that for Dante to have known who they were and what they did, he had to have either known them personally or heard news about them. The role that news played in Dante’s knowledge of his characters is made even more salient by the fact that he takes people from all but three of the main provinces of Italy (Apulia, Basilicata and Calabria) and from all of the important cities. The breadth of native cities of the characters found in the \textit{Comedy} is best illustrated by the division of the \textit{malebolge} in the \textit{Inferno}.\textsuperscript{89} This implicates that Dante was a well-informed citizen on the peninsula’s current events and that he not only relied on written works to find the souls to populate his \textit{Comedy} with, but also relied heavily on oral testimony.

Unfortunately, since Dante lived several centuries before recording technology was invented, we’ll never have any direct evidence of the oral traditions that existed

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{89} Almost each section has its city: Bologna for pimps, Lucca for flatterers, Rome for simoniacs, Mantova for false prophets, Sardinia for barraters, Bologna and Florence for hypocrites, Pistoia and Florence for thieves, the Romagna for false counselors, Puglia for fomenters of discord, Siena and Florence for falsifiers.
during his lifetime. Resuscitating non-written cultures is a nearly impossible endeavor. However, from medieval texts that reference how news traveled back then, we can begin to paint the picture of how Dante learned of news in far off cities as well as locally. We know from the *Decameron*, for example, that the commune acted as a broadcasting system, where its citizens were either “intenditori” or “novellatori.” In Brunetto Latini’s *Tesoretto*, Latini says that he only learned about the outcome of the Battle of Montaperti after asking a Bolognese scholar who was travelling opposite him on the plain of Roncesvalles in Spain. Often, communication between cities occurred in a haphazard fashion, where those who were making the journey anyway would transmit the news, but for important military or political events, special couriers would be dispatched. The most urgent of these messages would be transmitted via smoke signal, almost at telegraphic speed. How long it took for messages to reach their destination depended on whether couriers went by foot or on horse. A correspondence could travel from Paris to Siena in only three weeks, and in 1315 Florentine messengers managed to bring news to the priors from Naples in just five days.

The relationship between history and memory, between written and oral culture, was one that was changing during Dante’s time. That written culture was the culture of the ruling class may hold true for other periods, but not for the Middle Ages. Folkloric culture was the only culture the people could impose alongside clerical culture. During the Duecento, several devices were used to commit words to memory. The “novelle,” for example, were refined by repetition into perfection, passed on from speaker to speaker. Rhyme or song often helped the illiterate who listened to these texts to commit them to

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90 VI, 1.
91 Davidsohn *Firenze*, 607.
memory. For example, Antonio Pucci created a transcription of Villani’s chronicle in terza rima called the Centiloquio, which he used to sing at the Mercato Vecchio. During this period, the written was developing alongside the oral, thus recourse to writing as a support for memory intensified, and as paper became more readily available, the communes began to order their lives on the written rather than spoken word. Memories based on oral tradition of course had their inaccuracies, as irrelevant aspects of the past are inevitably edited out for their incomprehensibility to present hearers. Villani’s recourse to solve that dilemma in his chronicle was an attempt to provide alternative views.

To understand the choices Dante made in his reading of history and current events, we must understand the inherently biased nature of historical sources at that time. Both chronicles and annals tended to be highly localized and often subjective. They served as a means of self-aggrandizement, be it for commune, family or individual, and always had a point to make or an axe to grind, whether it be in the service of politics, law or religion. Chroniclers were not modern, detached historians; they were partisan and highly opinionated. Jacques LeGoff, in his book History and Memory, says this is because when cities established themselves as political organisms conscious of their power and prestige, they also wanted to “enhance this prestige by boasting about their antiquity, the glory of their origins and founders, the exploits of their former citizens, and the exceptional moments when they enjoyed the protection of God…” Ronald Witt, who performed a painstaking count of all the transalpine historical writings before the 1150s, says that the impetus for writing civic history began with the Treaty of Constance

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in 1183, which gave Italian cities *de facto* autonomy.\textsuperscript{93} Witt believes that this change demanded historical writing that would provide the commune with a sense of identity, a sort of nationalist propaganda if you will.\textsuperscript{94}

Chromiles and annals in the Duecento and Trecento were not considered inviolate texts; rather they were more considered to be public property that was to be added to, appropriated, adapted and rewritten with new emphasis, kind of like Wikipedia is to us today. They were constantly taken over by other historians and compilers. Take for example the *Annali genovesi*, which covered the various governments in Genova from the middle of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century to the end of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{95} The *Annali* are somewhat unique because they were started by a private citizen, Caffaro, but taken over and deemed official by the commune and placed in the public archive. The annals were written by many hands over the years, but, because they were all notaries, they carried the weight of authority. Annals, by their very nature, are subject to more than one author, most of whom remain anonymous, because their structure involves year-by-year entries of events that affected life in their cities (coronations, deaths of kings and emperors, elections of popes, etc.) and obviously needed to be taken over in order to go uninterrupted. Chronicles differed in that they often excluded, omitted and distorted information as it would hurt or help their narrative process and render the text more coherent. Janet Coleman summarizes the differences between the two best when she writes, “The common statement that chronicles are ‘written,’ while annals are merely ‘compiled,’


\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 119.

carries the inherent implication that the chronicler is a literary figure, whereas the annalist is simply a collector and synthesizer of factual data.”

Perhaps the Treaty of Constance justifies the flowering of the annalist tradition in the northern Italian communes in the 12th century more than it does the boom of chronicle writing around the same time. Annals were by their very nature civic-minded. They only recorded events that were of relevance to their cities—however insignificant. Chroniclers, on the other hand, could be more selective in what they chose to include in their narratives. Chronicles, rather than drawing their inspiration from the desire to push propaganda for a particular city-state, were often inspired or organized around historical events or periods of history that were inherently polarizing. For example, the events surrounding Frederick’s descent into Lombardy gave us Salimbene de Adam’s anti-imperial Cronica. The political tragedy of Ezzelino III da Romano’s reign in the Veneto gave us Rolandino da Padova’s scathing Cronica in factis et circa facta Marchie Trivixane. The passage of the kingdom of Sicily from Swabian to Angevin hands was also chronicled with certain biases: the Liber gestorum regum Sicilie by Saba Malaspina shows a bias in favor of the Angevins and the Church while Riccardo da San Germano’s chronicle presents events from the Ghibelline-Swabian point of view. The Sicilian Vespers and the war between the Angevins and Aragonese also drew chroniclers with strong points of view: Niccolò Speciale, an ambassador of Frederick II of Aragon, was spurred on by the polarizing event to present his Aragonese-driven narrative.

While all of this prior research has been extremely informative to the study of Dante’s historical sources, much remains to be done to pin down Dante’s precise sources

96 Ancient Memories, 4.
97 Speciale’s Historia Sicula was completed too late to be consulted by Dante.
and to identify how much of what he knew came from his own observation or hearsay. In 1965, Aquilecchia left us with this question: “Wherever the historiographic tradition does not offer us a precedent for Dante’s historical or legendary references, should we suppose that he drew his information from a written source now lost or unknown to us?” Sadly, in the more than 50 years since, Aquilecchia’s article has been cited very few times and his question remains unanswered. This dissertation intends to remedy that.

The present study seeks to uncover Dante’s sources for historical characters in the *Divine Comedy*. By “historical,” I intend characters who are not Biblical, like Adam, or literary, like Dido. I intend real people, whose lives we can document in the historical record. The lack of citation of Dante’s historical sources is widespread throughout the commentary tradition of the *Comedy*. Often, commentators will only supply information about a character’s biography that we know from our 21st-century bird’s-eye view of the past. Otherwise, they will cite Villani, as if providing a contemporary chronicler to Dante explains away Dante’s knowledge of a person or event. But that completely ignores the complicated relationship between the two authors’ texts. As we have seen above and will discuss further in this thesis, one cannot make the assumption that if Villani knew it, Dante must have known it. Therefore, the present investigation is an attempt to locate Dante’s specific source material and especially direct citation of a historical text wherever possible. Many scholars have exhaustively investigated Dante’s study of ancient Roman history, but since the characters in the *Comedy* are overwhelmingly

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98 “Dante and the Florentine Chroniclers,” 31.
contemporary or near contemporary to Dante, it is even more important that we account for Dante’s knowledge of recent history. Therefore, this study will perform a thorough investigation of historical characters who lived just preceding Dante (beginning as early as the 11th century) or during Dante’s lifetime. It will exclude anyone whom Dante may have known personally so as to focus solely on people he had to have learned about secondhand, whether by means of written texts or oral tradition.

In Maria Corti’s essay “La Commedia di Dante e l’oltretomba islamico,” she defined three methodological possibilities for connections between Dante’s Comedy and other texts, which she used to investigate his interaction with Islamic sources. They are 1) Interdiscorsività: a piece of vocabulary, a general news item or something that’s common knowledge, in which case it’s nearly impossible to pinpoint a direct source, 2) Intertestuali: when an author either reads a text and uses it as a model for structure or hears an oral summary of it and one can detect a thematic correspondence between the two texts 3) Fonte diretta: there’s no question that the author is formally citing another text. These three categories get progressively more deliberate in the author’s “borrowing” from another source. While most philologists only deem evidence of a direct textual source worthy of discussion, I have broadened my scope to include sources that would fall under the “Intertestuale” category as well, since history writing is a much more complicated genre to individuate direct textual citation in than literature, as facts tend not to belong to any one writer. I have also considered sources whose mere existence Dante could have been aware of, even if he never read them.

So as not to overwhelm the scope of my project, I chose three specific groups of characters to focus on: 1) characters involved in the Florentine-Sienese battles of Montaperti and Colle Val d’Elsa; 2) characters associated with the Sicilians dynasties, including the Normans, Swabians and Aragonesi; 3) characters embroiled in sensational, newsworthy events during Dante’s lifetime. As you can see, the first two chapters will focus more on written tradition and Dante’s study of history while the last chapter will focus more on oral tradition and how Dante informed himself on the news of his day. With these choices, I’ve tried to be as inclusive as possible in giving a panoramic view of how medieval Italians learned about the most important events of their times, be it the deeds of royals or the papacy, significant battles, murders or political chess moves. My research will draw on a three-tiered methodological approach: close textual analysis of primary source material; historical contextualization of primary documents through archival research and secondary histories; and interpretation of primary texts.

Chapter 2: The Battles with Siena explores the key players in one of the most significant events pre-dating Dante’s life: the Battle of Montaperti of 1260, as well as the follow-up battle between the two warring Tuscan cities, the Battle of Colle Val d’Elsa of 1269. The characters from the *Comedy* addressed in this chapter include: Farinata degli Uberti, the leader of the Florentine Ghibellines, Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, a cardinal and the only Ghibelline supporter at the Papal Court at the time of the battle, Cavalcante Cavalcanti, who was exiled after the battle and married his son to Farinata’s daughter as part of a peacemaking effort, Bocca degli Abati, who betrayed his Guelph party when he cut off the hand of the Florentine standard-bearer, Guido Guerra, a leading Guelph who voted against the battle at Montaperti, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, who also tried to dissuade
the Guelphs from fighting at Montaperti and fought courageously in the battle,

Provenzano Salvani, the *de facto* Ghibelline ruler of Siena who lost his life at Colle Val d’Elsa, and Sapia de’ Saracini, Provenzano’s aunt, who prayed her own Ghibelline party would lose at Colle Val d’Elsa.

A battle like Montaperti, in which Florentine Guelphs fought Florentine and Sienese Ghibellines, because it was charged along party lines, produced a wealth of coverage by various Tuscan chronicles, both Florentine and Sienese, who often reported their information from very subjective, localized viewpoints. The historical sources consulted for this chapter include: the *Annales Florentini I*, the *Annales Florentini II*, the *Chronica de Origine Civitatis* and its vernacular translation, the *Libro Fiesolano*, Dino Compagni’s *Cronica*, the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle, the pseudo-Petrarch chronicle, the *Gesta Florentinorum* by Sanzanome, the vernacular *Gesta Florentinorum* by an anonymous author, the chronicle contained in the Napol-Gadd manuscripts, Martin of Troppau’s *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum*, Thomas Tuscus’ *Gesta imperatorum et Pontificum*, Tolomeo da Lucca’s annals, Paolino Pieri’s *Croniche della città di Firenze*, the *Libro di Montaperti*, the *Novellino*, *La Sconfitta di Monte aperto* written by an anonymous author, Brunetto Latini’s *Li livres Dou Tresor*, the *Cronichetta* contained in the Magliab. XXV.505 manuscript, the anonymous *Gesta lucanorum*, the *Cronaca Fiorentina* by Marchionne di Coppo Stefani and the *Cronaca senese* by Paolo di Tommaso Montauri.

In studying these sources I hoped to reveal Dantean biases. I wanted to know if Dante used solely Florentine sources, as they were the most easily accessible, or if he performed a more thorough investigation by consulting Sienese sources as well. I hoped
that by discerning his sources, we could learn if he chose texts that tended toward Guelph or Ghibelline beliefs or whether they tended to be more objective. However, as my research will show, despite consulting a sizeable amount of historical sources, the information contained in the surviving record does not come close to accounting for all of Dante’s information about the battles. This result is further complicated by Dante’s authorial relationship with Villani, who reports almost to the letter, with very few exceptions, the exact details about the battles between Florence and Siena that Dante reports. This throws a wrench in the hypothesis that Dante and Villani obtained their information through oral tradition, as the overlap in their details would not be so substantial. Furthermore, their details about the battles are then copied and re-reported by two major chronicles that came after Villani. Therefore, Villani’s *Nuova Cronica* and Dante’s *Comedy* are analyzed even further in order to aid in future research on Dante’s knowledge of these two battles. My expectation is that this chapter will eliminate a large amount of work for any future scholars.

Chapter 3: The Sicilian Dynasties moves us from the local political stage to the larger Italian context and focuses on the Norman, Swabian and Aragonese rulers of Sicily, beginning in the 11th century with Robert Guiscard and ending in the 14th century with Constance II of Aragon. Other characters from this chapter include William II, King of Sicily, Empress Constance, wife of Henry VI and mother to Frederick II, Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, Manfred, Frederick’s son and King of Sicily, Pier delle Vigne, Frederick’s advisor and chancellor, Asdente, known for his prophecies against Frederick, Michael Scot and Guido Bonatti, Frederick’s astrologers, Peter III of Aragon, Constance II’s husband who took back Sicily. In addition to some of the sources from Chapter 2, I
searched the following sources for information on the history of the island and its rulers found in the *Comedy*: Guglielmo da Puglia’s the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, Alessandro Telese’s *De Rebus Gestis*, Riccardo da San Germano’s *Cronaca*, Falco of Benevento’s *Chronicon Beneventanum*, Romuald Guarna’s *Chronicon*, Hugo Falcandus’ *Liber de Regno Sicilie*, Nicholas Jamsilla’s *Historia de rebus gestis*, Saba Malaspina’s *Liber gestorum regum Sicilie*, Salimbene de Adam’s *Cronica* and the anonymous *Lu Rebellamentu di Sichilia*.

As it was the very rule of the Swabian house of Hohenstaufen that divided Italy’s political parties into supporters of Pope or Emperor, this chapter is very important for understanding Dante’s changing political views. By uncovering the sources Dante trusted in to understand the complicated politics of southern Italy and especially its relations with the Church, we can pinpoint more accurately the different stages of Dante’s political vision. The sources were mined for Dantean details that were peculiar or singular, so as to isolate Dante’s knowledge of these most famous families of Italy from what was common knowledge to all Italian citizens. These peculiar details include Frederick’s Epicureanism—more difficult to come by than one might think—Constance leaving her monastery, Manfred’s death-time penance and the words the Palermitans shouted out on the day of the Sicilian Vespers, among others.

Several texts emerge as good candidates for Dante’s knowledge of the Sicilian dynasties, including a version of Brunetto Latini’s *Tesoro* by an anonymous compiler and Thomas Tuscus’ *Gesta imperatorum*, but the most compelling sources are Saba Malaspina’s *Liber gestorum regum Sicilie* and Salimbene de Adam’s *Cronica*, both Guelph accounts. I put forward a theory that due to their biographies of Frederick,
Asdente, Manfred and Conradin, Dante most likely read Salimbene first and then Malaspina, in between his writing of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Dante’s reliance and trust in these two chronicles written by staunch Guelph supporters and members of the clergy (Salimbene was a Franciscan friar; Malaspina was a bishop and a secretary in the papal curia) would suggest that though he was the guest of several prominent Ghibellines during the early years of his exile, he had not yet become a “party unto himself” (*Par.* 17.67-69) and still trusted in the veracity of a chronicle written from the Guelph point of view. I discuss why Salimbene’s habit of quoting Scripture fit well with Dante’s writing of a Christian epic, how Salimbene’s tendency to present his information according to his Joachite beliefs aligned with Dante’s beliefs that one can anticipate the future by scrutinizing history, as well as the stylistic similarities between the two authors.

Chapter 4: How Dante Got His News uses previous research on modes of medieval communication to better understand how Dante consumed real-time information. It also presents the reverse order of transmission and studies the newsworthy events in Dante’s *Comedy* to see what type of information was typically consumed and reported by medieval Tuscans. Characters covered in this chapter include Adamo of Brescia, who counterfeited gold florins, Benincasa d’Arezzo, who was murdered by Ghino di Tacco inside the papal audit office, Guccio de’ Tarlati, who drowned in the Arno after being thrown from his horse, Guercio de’ Cavalcanti, who was killed by the villagers of Gaville, Lano Maconi, a member of the Sienese spendthrift brigade, Pia de’ Tolomei, who was perhaps killed by being thrown out a window, Sassolo Mascheroni, who was rolled through Florence in a barrel of nails, Ugolino della Gherardesca, who was imprisoned with his sons and grandsons in the Torre dei Gualandi, Vanni Fucci, who
stole from the church of San Zeno, Friar Gomita, who took bribes from prisoners, and Friar Alberigo, who murdered his brother and nephew in grand fashion. These deaths, murders, robberies and arrests, due to their sensational nature, would have warranted the attention and/or gossip of all the citizens of Tuscany. These characters were chosen first because Dante did not know them personally, and therefore had to learn news of them, and second because none of them were from Florence, which meant that news had to travel. ¹⁰¹ As we will see, though, it typically did not have to travel far.

This chapter concentrates largely on oral tradition, or what traces remain of it in written testimony. It seeks to understand how news spread in medieval Tuscany, considering letters, poems, paintings, gossip, recitations and chronicles as Dante’s potential sources of information. It discusses Italy’s unique public of urban readers who were eager for information and addresses Dante’s information-gathering process, comparing it to that of a modern-day journalist. Some of the new sources not considered in previous chapters include: a series of tenzoni consisting of 17 sonnets composed by Monte Andrea in conjunction with several other poets about the military campaign of Charles of Anjou against Conradin in 1267-1269, Pietro Cantinelli’s Chronicon and Cecco Angiolieri’s sonnets. Vernacular poetry is discussed at length due to its dual nature as both an oral and written text, one that would be read to a public audience, often simultaneously propagating and responding to news. It also considers Dante’s Comedy as one of the written texts that preserves oral transmission, discussing Guccio de’ Tarlati’s drowning, Sassolo Mascheroni’s death and friar Alberigo’s murderous banquet as cases where Dante himself seems to allude to hearing these pieces of news rather than reading them. Finally, chapter 4 closes with a discussion of how Dante differed from both a

¹⁰¹ The exception is Sassolo Mascheroni, whose inclusion will be explained in the chapter.
historian and a journalist and forged his own role in writing about and shaping history, especially when he is our only surviving account of record for an event or a person’s life.

While time constraints did not allow for the inclusion of a fifth chapter, when I transform my dissertation into a book I will include a fourth category of characters that will address the events and important figures surrounding the court of the imposing figure of Ezzelino III da Romano. The characters from the Comedy of interest to this research are Ezzelino III da Romano, the tyrant who ruled over Treviso, Buoso da Duera, an adversary of Ezzelino, Cunizza da Romano, Ezzelino’s sister, Sordello, who was Cunizza’s lover and abducted her at Ezzelino’s behest, Jacomo da Sant’Andrea, a spendthrift from Padova who may have been executed by Ezzelino, Obizzo da Este, who led Guelph crusaders against Ezzelino, Venedico Caccianimico, head of the Bolognese Guelphs and follower of Obizzo, and Jacopo Del Cassero, who was murdered on Ezzelino’s orders. The texts that are of interest to this chapter are Albertino Mussato’s Ecerinis, a five-act play that documented Ezzelino’s tyrannical career, Rolandino of Padova’s Cronica in factis et circa facta Marchie Trivixane, which details the Paduan struggle against Ezzelino, and Riccobaldo da Ferrara’s Chronica parva Ferrariensis, which follows Obizzo II d’Este’s rise to power.

Time constraints also contributed to a few limitations of this study. The first is a wider contextualization of Dante and his sources within the framework of medieval Florence. A description of how Florence ran and a more detailed description of how its diplomatic networks worked will be included when I turn my dissertation into a book. I am also missing a more in-depth discussion of how each of the various points of information, be it chronicles, annals or poems, relate to each other. Finally, as it is a weak
point in my argument, I intend to include a better sense of the medieval readers of both 
chronicles and Dante’s *Comedy*, as the *Comedy* suggests that they were well informed 
about the current events of their time. While I touch on it briefly, I will include a better 
discussion of how Florentines saw their history at the time and how that connects to 
Dante’s views on human nature and sin. A more informed sense of my sources’ 
circulation would also help to better understand Dante’s readership.

Another limitation of this study comes from my inability to read each chronicle 
holistically. They were mined for their specific pieces of information rather than read as 
their own products. I did my best to use critical editions and secondary bibliography to 
get a grasp for what the chroniclers’ points of view were, particularly whether Guelph or 
Ghibelline, as history in the Middle Ages was always written with a precise purpose or 
goal in mind. I am fully aware that they are not homogenous in their approaches or goals. 
However, the sheer volume of sources I have consulted has made the task of reading each 
one from beginning to end impossible, and I have chosen to rather be as inclusive as 
possible in an attempt to truly exhaust all possible sources for Dante’s information.

It is easy for us to determine when Dante gets history wrong. Modern historians 
have the tools necessary to confirm the facts of history, or at least the capacity to declare 
that a fact cannot be confirmed nor denied. We can look at parish and episcopal records, 
commercial projects, public charitable funds, tax rolls, wills, accounts of family wealth 
and investments in companies, and official letters and chancery documents to see if 
Dante’s information about an historical event or person was correct. But that does not 
help us understand Dante or the way his mind worked or the choices he deliberately 
made. It is only once we determine which of Dante’s historical errors were made
unknowingly and which were poetic invention that we can begin a discussion of whether he made those choices out of convenience, because it suited his personal or political beliefs or because he wanted that error to serve a specific function in his poem. We can also scrutinize the errors that he made unknowingly (i.e. he followed the tradition of some other historical source) and decide whether he scrutinized the source before including the erroneous information in his poem or if he placed blind faith in it.

Manfred’s physical description in Purgatorio is a great example that will be discussed more at length in chapter 3. But to sum it up briefly, there is no contemporary source that corroborates the descriptions of the wounds Manfred sustained in the Battle of Benevento: one to his brow and one to his breast. Once we have eliminated Dante’s reading of that information elsewhere, then we can more fully put forth hypotheses as to why Dante would invent that information and choose those two locations in particular. It strengthens the arguments out there that Manfred’s wounds are meant to be Christ-like or that those two points on the body represent pride and rebellion. The reverse can be true as well. If we locate a fact within a historical source that Dante includes in his Comedy, especially when other information contained in that source corroborates Dante having read it, then we weaken other arguments out there that think the fact is actually Dantean invention. Take, for example, Manfred’s physical description as blonde, handsome and of noble appearance. Many commentators believe Dante is trying to make Manfred into a new David with this description. But when that exact description, in that exact order, is made by Saba Malaspina about Manfred it weakens that argument. Now the argument becomes that either Malaspina was trying to make Manfred into a new David and Dante
was unoriginal in copying him, or Dante is simply pulling a physical description from Malaspina with no understanding of the David connection.

It is a difficult task to determine what Dante’s historical sources were, one that is sometimes impossible short of Dante pilgram stating outright in the *Comedy* that he had read the title of a certain chronicle, annals or history. Unlike Dante’s literary references, which can be tied so easily to their one, sole author, history belongs to no one. We may only ever speculate who or where Dante learned about a historical event or person, but even the speculation is worthwhile, because it gives us new insights for understanding Dante’s compositional process, his authorial choices, and most importantly, how he felt about his present society and the men who came before him.
CHAPTER 2: The Battles with Siena

Around the middle of the 13th century, tensions were mounting between Florence and Siena. Both cities (Florence the Guelph stronghold; Siena the Ghibelline stronghold) wanted hegemony over Tuscany. Siena went on the offensive in 1251 when it made an alliance with Pistoia, Pisa, and the Florentine Ghibellines headed up by Farinata degli Uberti against the Guelphs of Florence, who were in power at the time. Florence, in turn, began encroaching on Siena’s contado and surrounding territories, forcing Siena into a truce in 1255. On July 31st of that year, the two cities signed an “eternal peace,” but the bad blood and years of friction between them made that agreement short-lived. The truce stipulated that Siena should never take in an enemy of Florence (or Montepulciano or Montalcino) but should rather hunt them off their lands. Thus, when Siena sheltered Farinata and his allies inside its walls after they were exiled from Florence in 1258, the truce was broken. The Florentines began raiding the Sienese countryside, prompting the Sienese to send a delegation to King Manfred to ask for protection. Initially, Manfred only sent a few soldiers along with a skilled captain known for his prowess in war, count Giordano d’Anglano, Manfred’s cousin. But after the Florentine army marched to the walls of Siena and skirmished with the German soldiers near the monastery of Santa Petronilla, capturing Manfred’s flag and dragging it in the mud in a sign of disrespect, Manfred sent 800 more German knights to help Siena’s cause.

The Sienese and Florentines readied for battle. The Florentines gathered allies from Lucca, Bologna, Piacenza and Orvieto and amassed an army about 30,000 strong—one third of whom were knights.102 The Sienese, in addition to the German knights sent

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102 Daniel Waley puts the estimate of the Florentine army at 16,100 men—1,640 of whom were mounted cavalry by a multiplication of a co-efficient of 15:2. Waley, Daniel. “The Army of the Florentine Republic
by Manfred, received support from Pisa, Cortona and the *fuorusciti* Ghibellines of Florence. Their army only had about 20,000 soldiers—about 2,000 of whom were knights. Count Giordano led the Sienese army, alongside the leaders of the exiled Ghibelline Florentines, Guido Novello and Farinata degli Uberti, and Provenzano Salvani, the leader of the Sienese Ghibellines. The Florentine army, meanwhile, was led by Florence’s *podestà*, Iacopino Rangoni of Modena. The fighting began on September 4 in a field where the Biena and Malena streams feed into the Arbia River. The Sienese army was divided into three troops—one led by count Aldobrandino of Santa Fiore, one by Count Giordano, and the third by Arrigo d’Astimbergo. The Germans began the assault and were the first to wound their enemy. The bloodshed lasted all day. A turning point came when a Florentine Guelph, Bocca degli Abati, betrayed his forces and cut off the hand of the Florentine standard-bearer, Iacopo de’ Pazzi. The Florentines began to retreat, but were pursued and slaughtered by the Sienese knights.

Neither ancient chroniclers nor modern historians have made an accurate estimate of the death toll. The only thing we know for sure is that far more Florentines died that day than Sienese. The Florentine losses have been estimated between 2,500 and 10,000, its prisoners estimated between 1,500 and 15,000. The Ghibelline exiles, led by Guido Novello and Farinata, entered Florence on September 12, nine days after their victory, and retook control of the city. It is unclear whether the Florentine Ghibellines were being chivalrous by giving the Florentine Guelphs time to get out of the city or if they just wanted to avoid further bloodshed. An estimated 1,500 people were forced to leave upon their return. Florence remained Ghibelline until 1266, when Manfred lost at the Battle of

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Benevento. The mass exodus of Ghibellines from the city at that time was even greater than their Guelph counterparts’ in 1260.

This is what we know about the Battle of Montaperti. But what did Dante know? What bits and pieces of news about this famous battle were talked about during Dante’s era? The battle that colored the Arbia red affected Dante profoundly and inspired some of his most celebrated verses.\textsuperscript{103} It was the culmination of a tragic chain of violent and hateful events spurred by the very political strife that Dante despised. The Battle of Montaperti also meant the end of the \textit{primo popolo}, whose era Dante looked back on with nostalgia. The battle took place five years before Dante’s birth, thus Dante’s only recourse to learn about the most poignant scenes from Montaperti was to either read about them or listen to oral stories about them.

The writing down of historical memory in Florence had just come into vogue during Dante’s time. As Pietro Santini puts it, in the centuries preceding Dante’s, it was much more important to Florentine citizens to secure freedom and power than it was to research their ancestors and leave behind a memory of their times.\textsuperscript{104} It was only once power was solidified that chronicle writing began to flourish. It was then, when the work of their fathers inspired the people to leave behind a record of themselves, that they realized just how scarce the memory of their city was.\textsuperscript{105} Before then, the only documents that made up Florence’s historical memory were a legend on the city’s origins, a few brief entries on local events, and an incomplete catalogue of consuls.\textsuperscript{106} These two

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Inf}. 10.85.
\textsuperscript{104} Santini, Pietro. \textit{Quesiti e ricerche di storiografia fiorentina}. Florence, B. Seeber, 1903.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{106} The legend contained in the \textit{Chronica de origine civitatis} was the first historiographical work produced in Florence and concerned the mythological founding of Florence as well as the destruction of the nearby town of Fiesole (See Hartwig, Otto. \textit{Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Ältesten Geschichte Der Stadt Florenz}. Vol. 1, 2 vols., Marburg, N.G. Elwert, 1875, pp. 35-65). Two Latin manuscripts of this work survive:
traditions—the legendary and the annalistic—grew out of a birth of patriotism and awareness of the formation of the commune in the 12th century. Del Monte defines these two paths as such: “… l’uno creava un’eredità da rispettare, l’altro seguiva le vicende della città, che quel passato si preparava a realizzare nel futuro.”\textsuperscript{107} The annalistic tradition was eventually amplified into the chronicle tradition, with more specificity of local and general history.

Florentine libraries possess an extraordinary number of chronicles from this time, the earliest of which are those that deal with the mythical founding of Florence and its relationship to nearby Fiesole, specifically the \textit{Chronica de Origine Civitatis}.

Chronologically, the \textit{Chronica de Origine Civitatis} was followed by the \textit{Annales Florentini I} (which cover 1110-1173) and \textit{Annales Florentini II} (1107 to 1247),\textsuperscript{108} the Latin \textit{Gesta Florentinorum} by Sanzanome,\textsuperscript{109} the vernacular (now lost but reconstructed by B. Schmeidler) \textit{Gesta Florentinorum} by an anonymous author (which Santini thinks must have covered 1080-1270),\textsuperscript{110} the vernacular translation of \textit{Chronica de Origine

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Del Monte, A. “La Storiografia fiorentina dei secoli XII e XIII.” \textit{Bullettino dell’Istituto storico italiano} vol. 62, 1950, pp. 175-282 (see p. 189).
\item See footnote 106 for these three sources.
\item Hartwig, Otto. \textit{Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Ältesten Geschichte Der Stadt Florenz}. Vol. 1, 2 vols., Marburg, N.G. Elwert, 1875, pp. 1-34. The only surviving manuscript of this work is the II.II.124 at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Civitatis, referred to as the Libro Fiesolano,\textsuperscript{111} and the Cronichetta contained in Magliab. XXV.505 at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze.\textsuperscript{112} These were the first ever attempts to record Florentine memory that have come down to us. All of these early attempts were followed in 1270 by the extremely successful and influential Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum by Martin of Troppau (also known as Martino Polono), a Dominican friar who had the bright idea of laying out papal and imperial history side by side on facing pages.\textsuperscript{113} This popular universal history was quickly vernacularized into Italian, and once its vernacular version began circulating in Florence, it gave Florentine chroniclers the idea to incorporate the history of Florence and Tuscany with the history of popes and emperors, thus pulling together the communal with the universal.\textsuperscript{114} Tolomeo of Lucca was one of the first to take this approach with his Annales (which covered 1061-1303), published in 1307.\textsuperscript{115}

The source Tolomeo da Lucca used for Florentine history is still a mystery, but since so many of the surviving anonymous chronicles of the time resemble each other or even copy from each other to the letter, historians have tried to reconstruct his source from the bits and pieces that survive. Santini has suggested that the chronicle contained in

\textsuperscript{111} Hartwig, Otto. Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Ältesten Geschichte Der Stadt Florenz. Vol. 1, 2 vols., Marburg, N.G. Elwert, 1875, pp. 35-65. It is printed in its entirety in a side-by-side column next to the Chronica de origine civitatis. The manuscript for this text is the C. 300 at the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Florence.


\textsuperscript{114} Santini, 30. There are 419 medieval copies of this work, 15 in Florence alone. See Kaeppeli, Thomas. Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi. Vol. 3, 4 vols., Rome, Ad S. Sabinae, pp. 118-123 for the count.

codex XIII.F.16 in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli (from the beginning of the 14th century), in which the history of the empire and the papacy is mixed with the history of Florence and Tuscany, is the closest to the original cronichetta Tolomeo used. Santini maintains that the compiler of the manuscript inserted his own work into the original cronichetta used by Tolomeo. Because the compilers of these 13th- and 14th-century chronicles took as they pleased from various works and edited out and added what they saw fit, the question of authorship and what was once “original” becomes extremely muddled. Several modern scholars have examined their selection criteria.\textsuperscript{116} For example, the Neapolitan codex, XIII.F.16, is extremely similar to a manuscript in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence, codex CXIX—the two compilations only start to diverge from each other in the second half of the 13th century. The Neapolitan chronicle is original to the compiler and copyists up until 1308; the Florentine one up until 1313, with the death of Henry VII. The so-called “Napoletana-Gaddiana” chronicle (the combination title given to codex XIII.F.16 at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli and codex CXIX at the Biblioteca Laurenziana) has further connections to two other chronicles, one known as the pseudo-Petrarch because it was mistakenly thought to be written by Petrarch and the other known as the pseudo-Brunetto Latini because it was mistakenly thought to be written by the author of the Tesoro. The pseudo-Petrarch and pseudo-Latini also resemble each other, and both take pieces from the anonymous Gesta florentinorum with new added material from sources unknown, as the Gesta stops much earlier in time.

All of these sources, as well as several others which we will discuss, share a similar trait in that they seem to copy each other in various ways for information relating to the distant past, but take on a character all their own for more recent events, which

\textsuperscript{116} See Santini, \textit{Quesiti e ricerche}, Schmeidler, Hartwig and Del Monte.
were undoubtedly closer to their lifetime and more likely flushed out with personal, firsthand knowledge. The problem with assessing the facts of the Battle of Montaperti stems from a lack of contemporary accounts. Because the news about distant events in these medieval chronicles either tend toward confusion and error—even in Villani—or, when accurate, are far too brief, modern historians have turned to official government documents, such as statutes, deliberations, elections of officials, and registers identifying the leaders of the army, as well as papal and imperial epistles to find out what really happened. It is doubtful, however, that Dante, in order to learn about the greatest battle of his forefathers, would comb through old government documents. It is more likely that he learned from one of the many chronicles or compilations circulating during the time. We know that after his crisis in 1290, Dante discovered “the words of authors and of the sciences and of books,” which led to his obsession with philosophy, the supreme mistress of that knowledge (Conv. 2.12.5). Is it possible that in this renewed interest in learning, Dante also turned to books with real stories from Florence’s past?

Before delving into the specifics of Dante’s knowledge about not only the Battle of Montaperti, but also a second battle that took place in Siena nine years later, the Battle of Valle Col d’Elsa, it is necessary to eliminate several works from the 13th century and early 14th century as possible historical sources for the Divine Comedy. Giorgio Petrocchi roughly dates Dante’s composition of Inferno to 1304-1308, but mainly between 1306 and 1308, and his composition of Purgatorio to 1308-1312. Thus, any historical source that Dante could have used for his knowledge of the Battle of Montaperti or the Battle of

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117 These can all found in the Libro di Montaperti, which will be discussed shortly.
118 If Dante had begun reading about Florentine history during this phase of his life, he does not explicitly allude to it in any of his works directly preceding the Comedy. No mention is made of the Battle of Montaperti in the Rime petrose, the Convivio or the De vulgari eloquentia.
Valle Col d’Elsa would have to have been made public to an audience before 1312\(^\text{119}\) (though probably before 1310 as the latest canto in which a character from one of these battles appears is \textit{Purgatorio} 13), and it would have had to cover the years 1260-1269. The earliest source of Florentine history we know of, the so-called \textit{Annales Florentini I}, written in the 12\(^\text{th}\) century and published by Otto Hartwig in 1875, only covers the years 1110 to 1173. The \textit{Annales Florentini II}, also published by Hartwig, only cover the years 1107 to 1247, though they do contain a list of consuls and podestà up to 1273. The \textit{Chronica de Origine Civitatis} and its vernacular translation the \textit{Libro Fiesolano},\(^\text{120}\) though published in the 13\(^\text{th}\) century and thus early enough to be read by Dante—and there’s evidence that supports his reading of it\(^\text{121}\)—only recount the legendary origins of Florence, and thus stop too far back in history. Another chronicle that was certainly written during the right time by a contemporary of Dante’s is Dino Compagni’s \textit{Cronica}, but not only does it only begin recording events in 1280, it went unread for three centuries when it was finally copied in the late 15\(^\text{th}\) century.\(^\text{122}\)

Finally, the so-called pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle was certainly written during the right time frame.\(^\text{123}\) Scholars believe the anonymous author began writing in 1285 about events of his own time, then went back to write the earlier part of his

\(^{119}\) To “publish” in the Middle Ages generally meant for an author to make their work public to an audience, which could consist of only one person or many. It could also involve intermediaries such as commentators, commissioners or dedicatees.

\(^{120}\) We know for sure that Villani read both of these works. In one version of the \textit{Libro Fiesolano}, a chapter is added that was not present in the Latin text that claims the Uberti family is descended from Catiline. In Book I, 41 of the \textit{Nuova Cronica}, Villani describes this fact as “non per autentica cronica [i.e. the Latin text of the legend], ma per alcuno scritto [the vernacular \textit{Libro fiesolano}].”

\(^{121}\) Dante refers to the Fiesolan legend in \textit{Inf.} 15.61-2.


\(^{123}\) This chronicle survives in two redactions: II.IV.323 in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (the original) and the Gaddiano 77 in the Biblioteca Laurenziana (a 15\(^\text{th}\)-century copy titled \textit{Chronica Romanorum Pontificum et Imperatorum}). The complete text was printed by Otto Hartwig in \textit{Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Altesten Geschichte Der Stadt Florenz.} Marburg, N.G. Elwert, 1875, pp. 211-237.
chronicle. Since the chronicle narrates events up to 1297, it was quickly discovered that Brunetto Latini, who died in 1293, could not have been its author (or at least its sole author). The manuscript that contains the original text of the chronicle, II.IV.323 in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, is considered precious because it allows a peek into the editing method these 13th- and early-14th-century compilers used. A column in the middle of the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle contains text from the pseudo-Petrarch chronicle while in the margins and in between lines we find news taken from the *Gesta Florentinorum*. Additionally, the author/compiler of the pseudo-Brunetto Latini adds new material about events from Florentine history either taken from other sources unknown or original to the author. This anonymous author/compiler and the anonymous author/compiler of the Napol-Gadd chronicle greatly resemble each other as they both took an approach of pulling pieces of information from the pseudo-Petrarch and the *Gesta Florentinorum*, then adding their own original text, although they were compiled independently of each other. Despite its great promise as Dante’s historical source, because the author/compiler of the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle wrote the oldest part of his chronicle second, he either died before he could complete it or simply did not want to go any further, because the chronicle is missing the years 1241-1285, right when the two Siena-Florence battles occurred.

All of the above sources were ruled out from the beginning, as they did not cover the crucial years of the battles. However, several other sources were considered from that time frame as well that *did* cover the years 1260-1269 but simply did not mention the battles. Martin of Troppau was the most obvious potential source of Dante’s. His *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum* was the most widely read and popular chronicle of
its time, especially in Florence. Florence’s libraries still contain at least 15 redactions from the 13\textsuperscript{th}, 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries. It also received several vernacular translations, the most authoritative of which, because it conserves the original graphic division of the popes and emperors, is Ashb. 552 in the Biblioteca Laurenziana, written at the beginning of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century. The original Chronicon had to have been written at the end of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, and while there are different versions of it, one that doesn’t go past the papacy of John XXI (1276-77), while several others go up to Nicholas III (1277-80), all the versions still put it being published within the proper timeframe for Dante to have read it. They also cover the critical period from 1260-1269. We know that other chroniclers of the time—Thomas Tuscus, Tolomeo da Lucca, Paolino Pieri and even Giovanni Villani—all consulted Martin’s work. However, neither the entry for the Pope nor for the emperor for the year 1260 mentions the Battle of Montaperti. As there was another important battle that took place that year, the Battle of Kressenbrunn between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Kingdom of Bohemia, Martin saw fit to focus his attentions there instead.

The most precious source for information on the Battle of Montaperti for historians is the Libro di Montaperti, published for the first time in 1889 by Cesare Paoli.\textsuperscript{124} The Libro di Montaperti isn’t necessarily a cohesive book but rather various registers, notebooks and papers—totaling 147 numbered pages—dealing with the battle, sewn together into a single manuscript.\textsuperscript{125} In fact, when Paoli created his critical edition, he had to rearrange some of the pages as they had gotten mixed up over the years and


were not in chronological order. The *Libro* is the only official document from a Florentine source about that battle that has come down to us and is unique in the military history of Middle Ages for the quality of its registers and documents. These documents include statutes, deliberations, elections of officials, and registers identifying the leaders of the army, scribed by different notaries. An invaluable work, it follows the preparations of the Florentine army leading up to the battle, day by day, from February 9 to September 3. The book has helped historians discern the Florentine participants of the battle, as more than 4,000 names were registered in it. However, the various pages of the *Libro* fell into hands of the victorious Sienese along with Florence’s *carroccio* at battle’s end and was kept in the archives of Siena until 1570, when it was returned to Florence and placed in the city’s Archivio delle Riformagioni. This means that they were not in Florence for Dante to read, but since there is great suspicion that Dante went to Siena shortly after his exile, he could have also read them there. The fact stands that this book is not a work of history and does not contain a narrative—it is a collection of government documents. It is highly unlikely that Dante set to the task of learning every minute detail of the Battle of Montaperti or that he would have turned to documents such as these. From what we know from the *Divine Comedy*, Dante’s knowledge of the battle was much more surface-level, which we will discuss in further detail shortly.

Because one cannot rule out a literary source when it comes to Dante’s knowledge of any subject, historical or otherwise, one final work was consulted for its coverage of either of the battles with Siena. The *Novellino* was the first-ever Italian collection of short stories, composed sometime between 1281 and 1300, most definitely
by a Florentine. Not only is the timing right, but the Novellino has a strong connection to oral tradition, both because it contains the types of stories that were circulating among the members of the emerging urban classes and the peasantry at the time and because the structure and brevity of the stories was such that they could be memorized and read aloud, which was the intention of the author—as he says in the proem, he proffered the stories in order that they could enliven the conversation of people who did not have good stories of their own to tell. Dante was not only familiar with the Novellino, but there’s evidence that he probably quotes from it in Purg. 10.73-93 when he recounts the tale of the miraculous salvation of Trajan. Unfortunately, the Novellino does not contain a single story from the battles with Siena, nor any that feature the major players from those battles.

Before delving into the sources that fit the criteria of 1) covering either the Battle of Montaperti and/or the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa or 2) being published before 1312, it is necessary to locate the specific facts about these battles within the Comedy that Dante had to have learned through either oral or written tradition, as the battles took place before he was born and when he was 4, respectively. We will turn to the cantos themselves to find all of Dante’s allusions to Florence’s terrible defeat at Montaperti followed by its redemption at Colle di Val d’Elsa. What I have kept in mind in examining Dante’s presentation of these characters who participated in the battles is the difference

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127 For more information on Dante’s possible sources for that story, see Vickers, Nancy. “Seeing is Believing: Gregory, Trajan, and Dante’s Art.” Dante Studies, vol. 101, 1983, pp. 70-72, 75-79. The Novellino also contains stories dealing with the primary subject of another chapter of this thesis: Frederick II.
128 Other literary sources were considered and ruled out, such as Guittone d’Arezzo’s canzone IV, which was written shortly after the Battle of Montaperti and laments Florence’s ruinous defeat and subsequent decline, which does not provide enough specific detail about the battle to have been used as a historical source.
between what we know in the 21st century and what Dante—or anyone for that matter—knew in the 13th and early 14th centuries. For example, the figure of Guido Bonatti was considered briefly as a possible character whom Dante learned about through his study of Montaperti. Bonatti was a prominent figure in the Ghibelline party, a celebrated astrologer whose talents were used in warfare. In particular, Bonatti served Ghibelline party leader Guido Novello (d. 1293) and counseled him on the precise, strategic moment to strike at the Battle of Montaperti. Dante condemns Bonatti in Inf. 20.118-120 among the diviners of the fourth bolgia.\(^{129}\) The knowledge that Bonatti counseled Guido Novello on when to strike at Montaperti is commonplace now in the 21st century.\(^{130}\) However, there is nothing within the text of the Comedy to suggest that Dante knew that about Bonatti or even knew that he was connected to Guido Novello or to the battle at all. It is very unlikely Dante knew anything of the specifics of Bonatti’s involvement with Montaperti.\(^{131}\) Bonatti’s ties to the Battle of Montaperti and Dante’s unawareness thereof is just one of the many pitfalls of assuming Dante’s knowledge is commensurate with that of a 21st-century scholar.

Therefore, the discussion of Dante’s knowledge of the battles between Florence and Siena will stay firmly within what is expressly stated in the Comedy. There is no better place to start than with the most prominent figure from the battle of Montaperti who appears in Dante’s poem: Farinata degli Uberti.\(^{132}\) Farinata’s appearance in \textit{Inferno}\(^{132}\)
10 is one of the most memorable of the entire *Comedy*, due in large part to Farinata’s unabashed pride in the face of eternal torment. Farinata was one of the most prominent members of the Florentine Ghibelline party of the generation just preceding Dante’s. He was driven from the city in 1250 when the Guelphs took back control of the city and was one of the many who sought refuge inside Siena’s walls. Ten years later, he got his revenge when he and the Ghibellines he led, along with Manfred’s soldiers and the Sienese, won at the Battle of Montaperti. He was able to finally return home and see his party reinstated in Florence but died only four years later, in 1264.

Farinata’s name is first mentioned by Ciacco in *Inferno* 6, when Dante inquires about him and other Florentines from his generation, whom he famously describes as “sì degni” (79). Dante shows a great interest in knowing what the outcome of their souls was—whether Heaven sweetens them or Hell poisons them (84)—but he does not tie Farinata in any way to the Battle of Montaperti here. It is not until Dante speaks directly to Farinata in the Cemetery of the Epicureans that we find out what Dante knew about his involvement in the battle. First, Farinata alludes to perhaps not treating Florence very well. Then, he says that Dante’s ancestors were opposed to his party, thus he ejected them from the city twice, once in 1248, but more importantly in 1260 after they lost at the Battle of Montaperti. Dante finally makes a specific reference to the battle in lines 85-87 when he responds to Farinata’s question about why the Guelphs treated Farinata and his family so badly: “Ond’ io a lui: ‘Lo strazio e ’l grande scempio/ che fece l’Arbia
colorata in rosso./ tal orazion fa far nel nostro tempio.”

The Arbia is the river that passes through the field where the battle was fought, and was stained red from the blood of the men who died there. The strazio and scempio refer to the great loss of life suffered by the Florentines that day. We get our final bit of information about Farinata’s role in the events surrounding Montaperti when Farinata responds to Dante, saying that he was not alone in fighting the Florentine Guelphs at Montaperti and that he did not lead the charge against them without cause. However, his most striking statement comes at the very end, when he says: “Mu fu’ io solo, là dove sofferto/ fu per ciascun di tòrre via Fiorenza, colui che la difesi a viso aperto” (91-93). Farinata here is referring to the meeting of the council of Tuscan Ghibellines that took place in Empoli at the end of September 1260. It was at Empoli that the council decided what to do with the newly conquered Florence. The overwhelming majority voted to raze it to the ground, including King Manfred, who wanted to eliminate the Guelph city that held a strategic position in the center of the peninsula once and for all. Siena, especially its leader Provenzano Salvani, was of course enthusiastic about the idea of destroying their main adversary in Tuscany. Farinata was allegedly the only one to stand up for his native city and save it

135 In 1283, Farinata and his wife were condemned posthumously as heretics by the inquisitor Salomone da Lucca. The inquisitor ordered their bones separated from the faithful and their belongings confiscated and sold. Historians, including Davidsohn, tried in vain to find the acts of the notary responsible for writing the sentence down, but it wasn’t until 1919 that Niccolò Ottokar accidentally discovered that the acts of the notary had been under a false name in the manuscript Archivio Notarile, B. 1462, Bernardino di Lanfranco. Atti dal 1280 al 1286 on pp. 42-43. For the full text of the sentence, see p. 160 of Ottokar’s article: “La condanna postuma di Farinata degli Uberti.” Archivio storico italiano, vol. 77, 1919, pp. 155-163.
136 In a letter to the Sienese, Manfred wrote: “E non basti a voi ed ai vostri discendenti… che Firenze sia deflorata del fiore della sua giovinezza, la spada vincitrice non si fermi se non quando il fuoco da essa scaturito non distrugga ed annichilisca, affinché non possa più avvenire che risorga” (Raveggi, 7).
137 Of Provenzano and Farinata being on polar opposite sides of the issue, see Folco, Tempesti. “Provenzano Salvani.” Bulletino senese di storia patria, vol. 43, 1936, pp. 3-53. Folco writes, “Uomini dallo stesso inquieto e incerto destino, figli della stessa stirpe ideale dalla fonte fiera e dal cuore indomito, dovevano urtarsi fatalmente per imporsi l’uno all’altro e imporre agli altri la propria supremazia” (p. 20).
from destruction. Sergio Raveggi puts this benevolent act into practical terms and argues that Farinata, rather than being the only one to stand up, was actually just the mouthpiece for all the victorious Florentines who had too many economic interests in the city and knew that they would have to fight yet another battle if they attacked, since the citizens of Florence, no matter which side they were on, would defend their city from destruction. The Uberti, Lamberti and Caponsacchi families still sacked the houses, towers and stores of their Guelph enemies. But even if Farinata’s strident defense of his city was only legendary, Santini points out that this still means he was believed by the people of Florence to be loyal and generous, a man who put his city above his party.

In sum, Dante thinks Farinata perhaps treated his fatherland too harshly. He knows that Farinata not only hunted Guelphs out of Florence in 1248 but that he exiled them en masse for a second time in 1260, after Farinata’s Ghibellines won the battle. Dante almost mentions Montaperti by name by referring to the river that ran through the battlefield, the Arbia, which he describes as being colored red from the blood of the soldiers. Dante describes the deaths the Florentine Guelphs sustained in the battle as a slaughter and a great loss, so he probably had some understanding of the large quantity of lives lost that day. He knows that Farinata was not alone in orchestrating the battle—whether that means the involvement of other prominent Florentine Ghibellines or Sienese or German soldiers is unclear—and that there was a history of infighting and exiling that gave Farinata a reason to fight the Florentines. Most distinctly, Dante knows about an

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138 For this one act, Dante exalts the merits of Farinata and his love for the patria. Barbi argues that Dante harbors no resentment or ill will toward Farinata for what happened at Montaperti and that when Dante tells Farinata his family was treated badly because of what he did at Montaperti, he does not say it in an ironic nor violent way, but very tranquilly and matter-of-fact (“Il canto di Farinata,”104). He argues that any attempt to see the way the canto is written as Dante pretending to still have Guelph sentiments in order to chronologically match the political views of Dante pilgrim in 1300 is absurd.
139 p. 8.
140 “Sui fiorentini,” 31.
event that took place after the battle was won—the congress at Empoli. He knows that everyone there wanted to destroy Florence but Farinata dissuaded them.

Among the other souls of the cemetery, we find two others with ties to Montaperti: Ottaviano degli Ubaldini and Cavalcante Cavalcanti. *Inferno* 10 acts as the center of the political factionalism of Dante’s day, Montaperti the gaping wound of that conflict. The four souls named in the canto can all be tied to the conflict: Farinata, Ottaviano, Cavalcante and Frederick II. Though Frederick II died 10 years prior to the battle, one cannot ignore the obviousness of including the very face of the Ghibelline cause alongside its greatest supporters. As for Ottaviano, Dante does not link him in any explicit way to the battle, so one cannot draw conclusions about his knowledge of Ottaviano’s involvement. Dante refers to Ottaviano only as “l Cardinale” because his given name wasn’t needed, as he was considered the cardinal *par excellence* of his time. He was an avid Ghibelline and often worked to help his party, hence working *against* the very church that employed him. Almost every 14th-century chronicler quotes him as saying, “If I have a soul, I have lost it a thousand times for the Ghibellines.” He was, in fact, the only imperial supporter at the Papal Court at the time of the battle. And while his inclusion in this canto certainly links him to the party cause, we cannot say with certainty that Dante knew anything of his behind-the-scenes involvement with the Battle of Montaperti.\footnote{Of Ottaviano’s involvement in the conflict between Florence and Siena, we know that just a short time before Montaperti he was plotting with the government of the Ventiquattro and the Ghibellines of Perugia and Orvieto to organize a block of communes against Florence (Folco, 15-16).}

As for Cavalcante, his link to the events and fallout of Montaperti is clear: In 1266 he committed his son, Guido, to marry Beatrice, daughter of Farinata (who was at that point deceased), as a peacemaking effort. It is not by accident that Farinata’s and Cavalcante’s tombs should be placed beside one another. It is highly unlikely that
Cavalcante, as a leading Guelph, did not fight in the Battle of Montaperti, as almost every man of fighting age in Florence at that time went to the battlefield. However, his name is not confirmed as one of the combatants in Paoli’s *Libro di Montaperti*. We know for sure that Cavalcante’s houses in San Pier Scheraggio were damaged after the Guelphs lost the battle and that he was subsequently exiled to Lucca and did not return until 1266.

However, the only fact that Dante seems to know about Cavalcante’s involvement in Montaperti is that he and Farinata’s children were married in an effort to soothe tensions between the two parties post-battle. Though Dante does not say he knows this explicitly in the *Comedy*, his placement of the two men next to each other as well as Farinata’s explicit reference to the “Arbia colorata in rosso” signal to the reader that he knew very well what consequences followed battle’s end. Thus, *Inferno* 10 of the *Comedy* seems to suggest that Dante knew nothing of Ottaviano’s involvement in the battle, just that he was a Ghibelline (as he is associated with both an emperor and a leader of that party). However, it does prove that Dante knew about the union between Beatrice (Farinata’s daughter) and Guido Cavalcanti as a means of making peace between the two parties. Dante could easily have learned this from talking to his friend Guido. He likely could not, however, have learned anything from Cavalcante himself, as he died in 1280, and Dante’s friendship with Guido began in 1283. Therefore, no historical source—involving Montaperti at least—is needed to explain Dante’s knowledge of these two characters.

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142 However, several other members of the Cavalcanti family are named, including Gianni Schicchi (p. 156 and 172)
The next Dantean character we will consider is Bocca degli Abati. Bocca was a noble Florentine whose name perhaps may have never made it into the history books if not for what he did at Montaperti. Bocca was infamously accused of cutting off the hand of the Guelph standard-bearer, Iacopo de’ Pazzi, at the decisive moment of the battle. This small action was ruinous, because the standard-bearer in the army served as the means of organizing and leading the soldiers. Thus, when the flag fell to the ground, the Guelph soldiers were left drifting and confused, allowing for their mass slaughter.

Historically, we know that Bocca most definitely was a secret Ghibelline fighting on the side of the Guelphs, because he was allowed to stay in Florence when the Ghibellines retook control of the city after the battle. However, in 1266, when the Guelphs retook control of the city after Manfred’s loss at the Battle of Benevento, Bocca was exiled but not put to death, leaving significant doubts that he was actually culpable for cutting off the hand of the standard-bearer, as it would seem at least in 1266 that this was not common knowledge.

What is for certain is that Dante had read about Bocca’s traitorous behavior and believed him responsible for the Guelph loss at Montaperti. Not only does Dante associate Bocca with his actions at Montaperti in *Inferno* 32, but also Bocca’s primary sin for which he receives punishment is a direct result of those actions. He is placed among the traitors to *patria* in the ninth circle, frozen in lake Cocytus up to his head, condemned as one of the blackest souls of Hell for having violated all bonds.

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144 Raveggi maintains that Florentine chroniclers who wrote about Bocca’s treachery were desperately seeking a cause for such a painful outcome, and while cutting off the hand of the standard-bearer most certainly could have caused great confusion, he believes placing all the blame on Bocca’s treachery as the decisive moment of the battle is excessive (p. 4).
Our first encounter with Bocca immediately alludes to what he did at Montaperti and to the consequences of his actions. Dante, walking along the frozen lake, “accidentally” kicks Bocca in the face. He says this happened either from desire, destiny or luck, but judging from Dante’s behavior later in the canto, one can assume he either wanted to kick him or felt it was his divine right to do so.\textsuperscript{145} The first words out of Bocca’s mouth are: “Perché mi peste? Se tu non vieni a crescere la vendetta di Montaperti, perché mi moleste?” (\textit{Inf.} 32.79-81). Thus, he is directly linked to Montaperti and to the punishment suffered upon him for his actions. Bocca even misidentifies Dante as the avenger of Montaperti. Dante and Bocca exchange some caustic bickering and go back and forth on Dante’s desire to know his name and Bocca’s violent refusal to give it to him. All of this tète-à-tête leads to an uncharacteristically violent outburst on Dante’s part, in which he becomes involved in the sin he is visiting. Dante grabs Bocca’s head by the scalp and pulls out his hair (\textit{Inf.} 32.97-105). The hatred Dante feels toward him is palpable, imbued with the pilgrim’s deep identification with the factional strife of his day. He calls Bocca a “malvagio traditor” and promises him that when he returns to earth, he will let everyone know that the news about Bocca is true and bring shame upon him (\textit{Inf.} 32.112-114). Here, Dante not only lets the reader know that he’s aware of the rumors surrounding Bocca’s treachery at Montaperti, but he is actually the one to confirm them as history, not gossip. Thus, Dante names himself as the account of record.

The last episode of the \textit{Inferno} that concerns major players in the Battle of Montaperti is canto 16 in which Dante meets three Guelphs, all from the generation that fought at Montaperti, all sodomites, rolling along together, their bodies shaped into a wheel, as they try to escape the fire raining down on their naked bodies. Among these

\textsuperscript{145} “se voler fu o destino o fortuna” (\textit{Inf.} 32.76).
men we find Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, a noble Florentine Guelph whose name was mentioned in conjunction with Farinata’s during Dante’s questioning of Ciaccio. Dante referred to the two of them as “si degni” (Inf. 6.76). We also find Iacopo Rusticucci, a non-noble neighbor of Tegghiaio’s who Dante also named in the Ciaccio episode as being among the men who turned their wits to doing well. Finally, the third in the triumvirate of the wheel is Guido Guerra, a member of the Conti Guidi, one of the most powerful noble families of Tuscany, and the grandson of Gualdrada di Bellincione Berti de’ Ravignani.

While Rusticucci was a Guelph of the generation that would have fought in Montaperti, there is nothing about Dante’s presentation of him that would lead the reader to believe Dante had read about his deeds in the battle. Thus, he will be eliminated from the discussion of historical sources for the Battle of Montaperti. Though, like Cavalcante, because he was exiled and his house was destroyed after Montaperti, it is fairly certain he fought in the battle.

As for Guido Guerra, Dante may have known something of the role he played in the Battle of Montaperti, because he says that Guido accomplished much in his life with wisdom and with sword (“fece col senno assai e con la spade” [Inf. 16.39]). Obviously

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146 “Iacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, e ’l Mosca, e li altri ch’a ben far puoser li ‘ngegni” (Inf. 6.77-78).
147 Santini believes these characters—Farinata, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, Iacopo Rusticucci, the unknown Arrigo and Mosca degli Lamberti—were revered by Dante, because, overall, they put peace above the promotion of their city (“Sui Fiorentini,” 29).
148 Rusticucci was a friend and neighbor of Tegghiaio Aldobrandi. The two often performed diplomatic missions together, such as acting as witnesses in peace negotiations between Volterra and San Gimignano and between warring parties in Arezzo, which found a happy ending in part because Tegghiaio was podestà of Arezzo at the time. Santini does not marvel at the idea of Dante placing them together or amongst the greatest Florentines of their generation. He writes, “Insomma nei documenti del tempo si muovono e rivivono le figure di Tegghiaio e di Iacopo: uomini di non grande stato, appartenenti cioè al patriziato minore, condizione che si avvicina a quella degli Alighieri; rappresentanti della parte schiappamente popolare della cittadinanza, aliena dalle ciecche passioni fazioni, desiderosa della prosperità e grandezza cittadina… durante un lungo e benefico periodo di pace generale; al punto da poterli considerare in certo modo come precursors dell’ideale, svolto da Dante nella Monarchia…” (“Sui Fiorentini,” 40).
someone with the nickname Guerra can be assumed to have been talented with the sword. However, Dante’s placement of Guido alongside these two other Guelphs of the very generation that was fighting the good fight against Siena and the imperial cause cannot be by chance. Guerra is known for having led the charge in yet another battle that took place in those crucial years between 1260 and 1269, the Battle of Benevento of 1266, in which Manfred was killed. However, his leadership during the Battle of Montaperti is more tenuous. We cannot completely eliminate the possibility that Dante learned about Guido Guerra when reading about the events of Montaperti for this brief mention of his accomplishments with the sword. However, it must be kept in mind that this does not necessitate a connection to Montaperti in terms of Dante’s knowledge of him.

Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, on the other hand, is directly associated with Montaperti. In fact, all that Dante tells us about him, aside from the fact that he was a sodomite and an honored and worthy citizen whose name Dante heard repeated with affection, is that no one listened to his advice before Montaperti. Dante writes, “L’altro, ch’appresso me la rena trita, è Tegghiaio Aldrobrandi, la cui voce nel mondo sù dovria esser gradita” (Inf. 16.40-42). When Dante says that Tegghiaio’s words should have been more pleasing above, he is almost certainly referring to the fact that Tegghiaio allegedly advised the Florentine Guelphs against engaging Siena in battle that fateful day in September that led to their disastrous defeat. Obviously, his party did not heed his advice, which Dante reproaches them for. Thus, the main fact we come away with from Inferno 16 that Dante had to have learned about from an unknown source is that Tegghiaio Aldobrandi thought it foolish to fight Siena at Montaperti and counseled his party against it, but nobody listened to him. Note the juxtaposition between Farinata and Tegghiaio, who are named
together in Dante’s conversation with Ciaccio. Farinata, who advised against the
destruction of Florence, managed to dissuade not only Florentine Ghibellines (who also
should not have wanted to see their city burn) but also non-natives like the Sienese and
the Germans under Manfred’s command, and beautiful Florence lived to see another day.
Tegghiaio, on the other hand, though he tried admirably to dissuade his own party against
going to battle, did not speak as convincingly as Farinata and failed, resulting in his
party’s defeat.

The Battle of Montaperti was not the only battle between Siena and Florence for
Farinata’s and Guido Guerra’s generation. Only nine years later, in June of 1269, another
battle broke out between the two cities in the city of Colle di Val d’Elsa, only about 20
miles from the field near Montaperti. Siena, this time without the help of Manfred, fought
against the Guelphs of Florence and the troops of a new major player in Italian politics:
Charles of Anjou, a member of the Capetian dynasty who was crowned King of Sicily
after defeating Manfred in 1266. The Guelphs and French troops easily defeated the
Sienese and allied Ghibellines, though they were outnumbered by about four times the
number of soldiers. This battle decisively made Tuscany no longer a region of warring
towns on opposite sides of the political spectrum but rather a Guelph stronghold in the
middle of the peninsula, a strategic position for the papacy and Charles of Anjou.

The man who led the Sienese troops into battle was Provenzano Salvani.
Provenzano was the de facto leader of Siena and a fervent Ghibelline if ever there was
one.149 The growth of his power over the course of the 13th century is well documented
by the books of the Consiglio in the Archivio di Stato di Siena. Provenzano was the

149 For more information on Provenzano’s political career and Dante’s presentation of him, see Folco
“Provenzano Salvani,” and Rossi, Pietro. “Dante e Siena.” Bulletino senese di storia patria, vol. 28, 1921,
pp. 3-86.
Provveditore of the Biccherna (the chancellery of Siena) and was elected to the Ventiquattro, a Ghibelline government made up of 12 noblemen and 12 popolani, or non-nobles. Provenzano consolidated his power by decreasing the powers of the podestà and increasing the powers of the capitano. From Frederick II’s death in 1250 onward, Provenzano became the center of military preparations and the asserter of Sienese Ghibellinism, recruiting anyone to his side who championed Swabian power, including the exiled Florentines. Provenzano was at the center of the strategizing that led to Montaperti. His efforts in recruiting help from Manfred and his constant communications with the Sicilian king provided his commune with both grain and troops to help combat against the Florentines. He was dispatched to Manfred to ask for even more German troops to bolster the numbers for the coming battle at Montaperti. However, because Manfred sent his cousin, Count Giordano, as the commander of the troops for that battle, Provenzano took a back seat on the field. That was not the case, however, with the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa, for which he was the Captain of the Ghibelline army. Chroniclers report that Cavolino Tolomei, Provenzano’s mortal enemy, killed Provenzano, beheaded him, then placed his head on a lance and paraded it through town. As we will see, several chronicles also reported the legend that Provenzano summoned the devil and asked him what would happen in the battle, to which the devil responded that Provenzano’s head would be the highest on the battlefield. Provenzano thought this meant that he would be victorious, when in fact it meant that he would die.

\[150\] Provenzano set off March 17, 1260 to meet with Manfred and returned 72 days later with 800 more German soldiers.
Provenzano appears in canto 11 of Dante’s *Purgatorio*, on the terrace of pride, carrying a heavy stone and learning humility.\(^\text{151}\) Oderisi da Gubbio introduces him as the man whose name all of Tuscany resounded with, though now they hardly whisper of him in Siena (*Purg.* 11.109-111). Oderisi frames Provenzano’s life in terms of his battles with Florence. He says Provenzano was the “sire,” or master, when “la rabbia fiorentina” was destroyed (112-113). This refers to the first battle at Montaperti, when the Sienese were victorious. Thus, Dante must have known about Provenzano’s involvement in that first battle, though he was not the captain of the army then. He also seems to know about Provenzano’s demise at Colle di Val d’Elsa because he refers to the fleetingness of Provenzano’s ambitions (i.e. that they eventually came to an end) when he evokes the image of the color of grass that fades with the seasons (115-117). Dante still does not know whom Oderisi is describing and must ask for his name. Provenzano is not named until line 121, where he is further identified as the man who tried to bring all of Siena under his control: “fu presuntuoso/ a recar Siena tutta a le sue mani” (122-123). Provenzano must pay for presuming too much on earth by walking without rest in the afterlife. We get one final detail that Dante had learned about Provenzano’s biography when Dante pilgrim asks Oderisi how Provenzano was allowed to enter Purgatory proper if he delayed repenting until the very last moments of his life. Oderisi’s explanation follows:

> “Quando vivea più glorioso,” disse,
> “liberamente nel Campo di Siena,
> ogne vergogna disposta, s’affisse;

\(^{151}\) Rossi believes Dante may have written *Purg.* 11 elsewhere but that he outlined and thought of it when he was in Siena (“Dante e Siena,” 69).
e li, per trar l’amico suo di pena
ch’e’ sostenea ne la prigion di Carlo,
si condusse a tremar per ogne vena.
Più non dirò, e scuro so che parlo;
ma poco tempo andrà, che ’ tuoi vicini
faranno si che tu potrai chiosarlo” (133-141).

This anecdote refers to Provenzano’s attempts to get his dear friend out of Charles of Anjou’s prison after the Ghibelline loss at the Battle of Tagliacozzo, where Conradin of the Hohenstaufens was defeated. Provenzano fell to his knees in the Campo di Siena and begged like a mendicant for money to save his friend, because the ransom set by Charles of Anjou was so enormous. Many scholars have speculated as to the identity of Provenzano’s friend. What is known for sure is that somehow Dante knew of his begging in the piazza and saw it as the torment of humbled pride, which earned him a spot in Purgatory.

In sum, in terms of Dante’s knowledge of Provenzano’s life that would have had to come from a secondary source, Dante had to have known at the bare minimum that Provenzano fought in both the Battle of Montaperti and the Battle of Colle Val d’Elsa and that he died during the latter. We do not have any evidence that he knew about the

152 This battle is discussed at length in Chapter 3.
153 The ransom was set at 25,000 florins. Folco quotes from the Codice senese I, VI, 31 in the Archivio di Stato that Charles of Anjou set the ransom that high “non cupiditate sed in despectum dicti Provenzani” (“Provenzan Salvani,” 67).
154 A book of the Biccherna from 1270 found in the Archivio di Stato di Siena notes a payment of 200 lire for Ser Orlando Orlandini and Riccobaldo Alamanni, ambassadors sent to Charles of Anjou in Tunisia for the ransom of M. Bartolommeo Saracini and Mino Pagliaresi. Folco maintains that the friend of Provenzano’s was Bartolomeo Saracini, because he was a loyal follower and a well-known Ghibelline, while Rossi believes it was Mino Pagliaresi, listed as “Minus dei Mini,” because the note on the manuscript says Salvani was Mino’s “servitor maximus et amicus commensalis.”
155 Folco, however, maintains that this public gesture was meant to show the people how cruel and greedy Charles of Anjou was.
legend wherein the devil tells Provenzano his head will be the highest on the battlefield, because Dante does not allude to this in any way, even though the story seems rife for appropriation.¹⁵⁶ Dante also had to have learned about Provenzano’s efforts to release his friend from prison and his acts of humility in the town square. Commentators who covered the congress at Empoli that followed Montaperti consider Provenzano to be the chief advocate of destroying Florence, but Dante makes no mention here of knowing that.

Only two cantos later, in *Purgatorio* 13, we meet Provenzano’s aunt, Sapia de’ Saracini. Sapia is not significant to the discussion of Dante’s historical sources because of anything she did in the battles. As a woman, and an elderly one at that, she would not have participated.¹⁵⁷ However, Dante seems to know who she is precisely because of her actions during the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa. We find Sapia on the second terrace of Purgatory, among envious souls whose eyes are sewn shut as they cry through their sutures. Just like Bocca degli Abati, Dante seems to condemn Sapia based on the very sin that links her to the battle. Sapia is in Purgatory because she prayed that God would defeat her fellow Ghibellines, her nephew among them, in the battle. The only reason she was able to climb Mount Purgatory, despite the gravity of her sin, was because Piero Pettinaio, a comb-seller who was made a saint of Siena for his compassion and piety, prayed for her soul.

Sapia’s speech in *Purgatorio* 13 is rather lengthy, and presents one of the more detailed presentations of a soul’s involvement in the battles between Siena and Florence. Dante and Sapia’s conversation begins with an exchange essentially about what it means

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¹⁵⁶ It is also likely that even if Dante knew the story, he would have omitted it, as it does not bode well for a soul in Purgatory to have made a deal with the devil.

¹⁵⁷ In Sapia’s speech to Dante, she says that the arc of her years was already descending: “già discendendo l’arco d’i miei anni” (*Purg.* 13.114).
to be a citizen. Dante wants to speak to someone who is Italian, but Sapìa corrects him and says that they are all citizens of the city of Heaven and only live in Italy as pilgrims (Purg. 13.94-96). Dante wants her to make herself known by place or by name, and she responds that she was Sienese, and though her name was Sapìa, she was not wise. Her speech continues with a description of the day of the battle at Colle:

Eran li cittadin miei presso a Colle
in campo giunti co’ loro avversari,
e io pregava Iddio di quel ch’è volle.
Rotti fuor quivi e voltì ne li amari
passi di fuga; e veggendo la caccia,
letizia presi a tutte latre dispari,
tanto ch’io volso in sù l’ardita faccia,
gridando a Dio: ‘Omai più non ti temo!’
come fé ‘l merlo per poca bonaccia (115-123).

Sapìa’s greatest sin was taking joy in seeing her own party driven out of Siena and praying that they would lose the fight at Colle. She believes she actually played a part in the outcome of the battle and knows she must atone for her ill-wishing toward her fellow citizens and her celebration of their loss afterward. However, the fact that Dante has placed her on the terrace with the souls of the envious would suggest that the reason Sapìa was rooting against her own people was because she was jealous of them, or, more particularly, jealous of her own nephew’s power and fame.\textsuperscript{158} Her jealousy, her prayers,

\textsuperscript{158} One of the theories put forth by scholars as to why Sapìa turned on her own party is tied to the rise of mysticism and religious passion in Siena at this time. The Sienese believed the victory at Montaperti to be an act of divine grace, and they wanted to stay in the good graces of the Church, who had actually excommunicated the entire city. This went against the Ghibelline program of allegiance to the Swabian
and her rejoicing would all have been very private matters done most likely in the walls of her castle of Castiglion Ghinibaldi, about five miles from the plain of Colle where the battle was fought. For chroniclers to have included the private hopes and prayers of an elderly woman who did not partake in the battle would be beyond strange unless legends were born that day and circulated in the years to come about Sapia being the cause for the Sienese loss, much the way Bocca was blamed for the Florentine loss nine years earlier. That is the only way Dante may have read about her in a secondary source.

Sapia is clearly vexed by her actions during the battle and must believe that those still on earth somehow know what she did, because she asks Dante to restore her good name when he returns to Tuscany: “… però col priego tuo talor mi giova./ E chieppiotti per quel che tu più brami,/ se mai calchi la terra di Toscana,/ che a’ miei propinqui tu ben mi rinfami” (147-150). This may provide evidence to Sapia’s treachery being a well-known fact at least in Tuscany, or at the very minimum among her relatives, her “propinqui,” who she specifically references and singles out from the rest of the Sienese, who pursue vain matters like trying to find an underground spring (152-153) or creating a path to the sea (152). Whether there is evidence for a legend about Sapia’s treachery in dynasty—enemies of the Church. We know that Sapia and her husband grew to be very religious toward the end of their lives, because they founded a hospital for pilgrims and the sick in order to atone for their sins. When Sapia drew up her will in 1271, she left the hospital and Castiglion Ghinibaldi (her castle) to the monks of the Dominicans of Siena.

For an in-depth discussion of Siena’s thwarted efforts both at buying the port of Talamone to use it as a commerce route and searching unsuccessfully for the underground spring known as the Diana, as well as Dante’s mockery of Sienese vanity, see Rossi’s article “Dante e Siena,” p. 6-14. Rossi believes that Dante knew about these efforts because he was living in Siena at the time and heard the excited discussions among the public. The government of Siena made repeated attempts to find the spring of Diana—all of which are preserved in the Archivio di Stato—continuing excavations and searching until about the end of the 13th century, when they damaged the church of the monastery and had to stop. They also bought the Port of Talamone in 1303, and by about eight years later it actually was bringing in enough commerce to put a dent in Florence’s earnings, so Rossi believes Dante’s scorn must refer to an earlier time. Rossi holds that Dante went to Siena during the first year of his exile (p. 14). One of his reasons is that the end of *Inferno* and beginning of *Purgatorio* are filled with almost exclusively Sienese people. Note that Dante was
the chronicle tradition was kept in mind when mining Dante’s possible sources of information.

To sum up, to account for Dante’s knowledge of the two battles and the Comedy’s characters involved in them, we must find sources for the following information: Farinata hunted the Guelphs out of Florence both in 1248 and in 1260. The Arbia is the river that passed through the battlefield. There was an enormous loss of life at Montaperti. At the Congress at Empoli shortly following the battle, Farinata was the only person to oppose the destruction of Florence. Bocca degli Abati cut off the hand of the Guelph standard-bearer (who was Iacopo de’ Pazzi, though Dante does not mention that he knows the name of the standard-bearer). Guido Guerra was talented with the sword (which could either be talking about Montaperti or Benevento). Tegghiaio Aldobrandi advised the Florentine Guelphs not to go to battle against Siena. Cavalcante’s son and Farinata’s daughter were married in a peacemaking effort (though Dante could have learned this from Guido Cavalcanti). Provenzano Salvani either fought at Montaperti or was at least the de facto ruler of Siena at that time (the sire). Provenzano tried to consolidate his power in Siena. He begged in the Campo di Siena to help save his friend who was incarcerated by Charles of Anjou. He died at the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa, where the Sienese and Florentines fought for a second time, but this time the Sienese lost. Finally, Sapia de’ Saracini betrayed her nephew Provenzano and her party by praying that the Ghibellines would lose at Colle di Val d’Elsa and rejoiced when they did (perhaps learned through a legend that blamed her for the loss).

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present when the white parties and the Ghibellines gathered in Gargonza, a castle between Siena and Arezzo, in the first half of 1302.
We must account for Dante’s knowledge of all of these facts. He was not alive when the first battle was fought and was only 4 when the second was fought. He did not know any of these characters personally, as most of them were dead by the time he came of age. There were only two means by which a medieval man could have learned about a newsworthy event—from a written text or artifact or by word of mouth. The problem of the modern scholar is that while we can study written tradition, oral tradition we cannot—not unless it was, paradoxically, written down.\textsuperscript{160} One cannot fully dismiss the possibility that some of Dante’s knowledge of the battles between Siena and Florence was learned either by people telling stories about legends from the past or from having conversations with the descendants of the people involved. The Battle of Montaperti, especially, was such a powerful, collective memory that people from Tuscany still know about it without ever having read about it, some 700 years later. They simply refer to it as “la battaglia.” In fact, a 20\textsuperscript{th}-century resident of Asciano, a little town only 15 miles from the battlefield, wrote an article for Taccuini Ascianesi, a periodical published by the Commune of Asciano, about certain “detti,” or sayings about the battle that he learned from his grandfather or were spoken on the playground growing up.\textsuperscript{161} For example, “Costa Berci ha questo nome perché ci berciavano (urlavano) i fiorentini,” or “In una certa zona del Pianto delle Cortine vi crescono solo ‘stiance’ perché durante la battaglia vi fu versato molto sangue.” If these sayings still circulate throughout Tuscany today,

\textsuperscript{160} For recent work on the interactions of oral and textual traditions, see Degl’Innocenti, Luca, Brian Richardson and Chiara Sbordoni, eds. Interactions Between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture. New York, Routledge, 2016 and Dall’Aglio, Stefano, Brian Richardson and Massimo Rospocher, eds. Voices and Texts in Early Modern Italian Society. New York, Routledge, 2017.

some 700 years later, imagine how many more there must have been in the decades immediately following the battle.

Rossi is very convinced that Dante learned most of what he knew about Siena from visiting there. He believes that not only did Dante stay in Siena after his exile until March of 1303, but that he also visited there in his early childhood.\textsuperscript{162} Rossi maintains that Dante learned all of the particulars of Sienese history and all of its salacious events by running through the streets of Siena and either hearing about them or seeing them: “ha avuto sotto gli occhi le prove.”\textsuperscript{163}

Egli ha conosciuto molte di quelle persone, ha udito i popolari racconti dei sontuosi eccessi della Brigata, ha veduto gli entusiasmi dei senesi e le loro ambizioni nella rivalità con Firenze, e di tutto questo ha fatto argomento per alcune delle sue cantiche meravigliose.\textsuperscript{164}

Rossi thinks Dante is especially dependent on his time in Siena for what he learned about Sapia. We know that Dante had a friendship with Beunuccio Salimbeni, a minor poet who was married to Baldesca, daughter of Sapia. Through a simple conversation, he could have learned about her mother’s prayers against her own party—assuming Sapia would ever discuss such a thing with her daughter. Rossi also proposes the possibility that Dante went on an information-gathering mission to Castel Ghinibaldi, Sapia’s castle, and heard what happened straight from the mouths of eyewitnesses.\textsuperscript{165} A. Lisini agrees that Dante could not have invented the episode for poetic convenience, because he would

\textsuperscript{162} Rossi’s evidence for this is that Boccaccio says Dante was “una tra le altre volte in Siena,” and that he was a regular of a certain spice vendor’s bottega, as he was enrolled in the Arte dei medici e degli speziali. He also references a legend that says Dante studied spelling with a teacher in Siena, possibly Benincasa d’Arezzo or Guido Bonatti.
\textsuperscript{163} “Dante e Siena,” 68.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 53.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 69-70.
not have spoken to her relatives in order to cement her fame in his poem if he were going to slander her with false accusations.\textsuperscript{166} Rossi thinks Dante met the descendants of Provenzano and of Sapìa and the disciples of local saint Piero Pettinaio and learned about events that were often things that only stayed in the family or at the very least in local chronicles that did not go beyond the limits of Siena. Rossi makes a valid point that if Dante heard about Sapìa’s jealousy driving her to pray for her fellow citizens to lose in battle and then subsequently turning to Piero Pettinaio for forgiveness, or about Provenzano’s pride being humbled in the town square where he begged for money for his friend, he could not help but draw from these moving episodes of pride and envy turned on their heads to breathe life into his poetry; “così come la vista dei luoghi richiama al suo pensiero immagini di scultoria verità.”\textsuperscript{167}

Finally, Rossi offers yet another oral source for Dante’s knowledge of the battles. He believes Dante could have learned about the Battle of Montaperti from his uncle, Brunetto di Bellincione. Brunetto’s name appears in the \textit{Libro di Montaperti} in the section on preparations for the first expedition made in April-May 1260, but he is not mentioned in the final expedition in September that ended in battle. It is highly likely that he fought in the final battle, as well, as almost all Florentine men of fighting age did. His role would have been as one of the guards of the \textit{carroccio} if he did. Rossi believes that Dante only trusted reliable sources like eyewitnesses, and thus would have collected the minutest particulars from his uncle.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{166} Lisini, A. “A Proposito di una recente pubblicazione su la Sapìa Dantesca.” \textit{Bullettino senese di storia patria}, vol. 27, 1920, pp. 61-89 (See p. 62).
\textsuperscript{167} “Dante e Siena,” 53.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 20.
While Rossi’s points are very convincing, and one surely cannot rule out Dante’s dependence on oral tradition completely, it is my opinion that it goes too far to say that Dante went to these descendants or to the sites of these battles with the intent of interviewing eyewitnesses and collecting testimony. Dante is not Villani. He was not writing a chronicle; he was writing a poem, one that he wanted to fill with real people. His poem does not contain the level of detail of a reporter. It is more likely that if he took any facts from stories he heard, it would have been as a passive listener whose imagination was sparked by something that stood out to him.\(^{169}\) Dante and Villani’s relationship will be discussed at length shortly, but what is important to know for now is that when Villani overlaps with Dante but gives even more detail than Dante does, Dante cannot be his source, and an “oral tradition” cannot be both of their sources (the likelihood that they heard the exact same facts from the exact same people is preposterous). The source in common had to be written.

Coverage of the two battles between Florence and Siena can basically be split into three categories: those who wrote before Dante and Villani, Dante and Villani, and those who wrote after Dante and Villani. Dante’s relationship to Villani is the fulcrum on which the chronicle tradition pivots. To begin, we will look at all of the historical coverage of the two battles that pre-dated Dante, i.e. that he could have used as a source. It must be stated that though Dante was a Florentine, no chronicle or work written by a native of a neighboring Italian city was ruled out and that works written in both vernacular Italian and Latin were included.

\(^{169}\) Alberto Del Monte also believes that Dante and Villani drawing the same details primarily from oral tradition are out of the question: Del Monte, A. “La storiografia fiorentina dei secoli XII e XIII.” *Bullettino dell’Istituto storico italiano*, vol. 62, 1950, pp. 175-282 (See p. 203).
It seems all historians who have written on the matter of Florentine historiography would agree that one of the oldest sources on Florentine history that was used by nearly everyone who came afterward is the vernacular *Gesta florentinorum* by an anonymous author. This work has been lost in its original form. However, it was reconstructed by Bernhard Schmeidler from surviving compilations that included excerpts from it and was published in 1930 in *Die Annalen des Tholomeus von Lucca in doppelter Fassung, nebst Teilen der Gesta Florentinorum und Gesta Lucanorum*. It covers the years 1080 to 1270 and is cited frequently by Tolomeo da Lucca and was used by Paolino Pieri, the Napoletana-Gaddiana Codex, Villani and Simone della Tosa, all of whose works we will touch on. The most striking feature of the anonymous *Gesta* is that it typically only presents brief snippets of information, which are usually very numerous but not very detailed. This is true about its coverage of Montaperti as well. For the year 1260, it matter-of-factly states that the Florentines, assisted by the Lucchesi and Pistoiesi, went to war with Siena, who was assisted by Manfred’s army. It gives September 3 as the date and says that the majority of Florentines were either killed or taken prisoner. It mentions that the Florentine Guelphs were ousted from Florence the following Thursday and took shelter in Lucca, while the Ghibellines returned to Florence on September 12. There is not a single person named who was a character in the *Comedy*. Guido Guerra’s name, however, is mentioned elsewhere, in entries for 1255, when he was the captain of a force that took Arezzo, and 1267, when he re-entered Florence with French troops and chased the Ghibellines out of the city. Thus if the *Gesta* provided Dante with any

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170 Beginning on p. 243.
171 Anonymous, “*Gesta Florentinorum,*” 263-264.
172 Ibid, 261-262.
information on the characters in the Comedy, it told Dante about Guido Guerra’s other
great deeds in war, sidestepping his involvement in Montaperti completely.

The next work that would certainly be one of the oldest sources on the battle if we
were to have an exact date for its composition is a short chronicle called La Sconfitta di
Monte aperto by the editors who published it in 1959, Cesare Segre and Mario Marti.\footnote{Anonymous. “La Sconfitta di Monte Aperto.” La Prosa Del Duecento. Eds. Segre, Cesare and Mario Marti, Letteratura italiana storia e testi, Milan, R. Ricciardi, 1959, pp. 938-946.} The reason the authors believe it is so old is that it is written from an eyewitness’s
perspective and often speaks in the first-person voice, as if the author is speaking to a
group of listeners in the piazza.\footnote{“come avete udite,” “nostri nimici fiorentini,” for example.} It is often rambling in parts and is most definitely
partisan in nature, and if this person was truly there in Siena the day of the battle, then he
had to have written down his account sometime before the 14\textsuperscript{th} century. The editors say
that it is not a chronicle, or even an excerpt from a chronicle, but rather “una rievocazione
ardente ed appassionata, partigiana e municipale, eppur quasi proiettata nel mito e
incredibile fede e dell’impossibile valore.”\footnote{Ibid, 937.} Segre and Marti are not clear as to where
they took the text from, except to say from the manuscript of Giovanni di Francesco
Ventura, in a miscellanea senese from 1844, pages 31-98.\footnote{Ibid.} Cesare Paoli says there’s a
copy from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century in the Archivio di Stato di Siena with the title “Croniche
senesi d’autore ignoto.”

The chronicle mostly tells the story of what was happening inside the city, the
famous nocturnal procession through the streets of Siena to the high alter of the Duomo,
led by Buonaguida Lucari, a popular leader in the community, who wore nothing but his
night shirt, not even shoes. There, Buonaguida dedicates the city to the Virgin Mary and
asks her to liberate them from the hands of their enemies, the Florentines. He, like many of the Sienese chroniclers, goes into great detail about the three gonfalieri of the army. Once he actually gets into the details of the battle, things move pretty quickly. He counts 100 Germans and 700 infantrymen or “fanti,” and another 200 cavalry led by Aldobrandino of Santa Fiore. The chronicler mentions several major players on the battlefield that day, but none of them are mentioned by Dante anywhere in the Comedy. For example, the Conte d’Arras commands the cavalry and kills the captain of the Florentine army, Count Giordano (Manfred’s cousin) is described as a new Hector, cutting up Florentines like the Greeks, count Aldobrandino Aldobrandeschi leads the Sienese forces, a messer Gualtieri kills someone by the name of Niccolò Garzoni, Niccolò da Bigozi’s horse is killed, but he is picked back up by his fellow soldiers and given another horse to ride and goes on to kill more than a hundred Florentines, and Arrigo di Stimbergo does so many things the chronicler cannot even recount them all. Now, it is completely natural for a Sienese chronicler to only mention men who fought on the Ghibelline side, but note that even Provenzano Salvani’s name is not given. The focus is heavily on the German forces and their prowess in war, as the chronicler writes, “Come quelli valorosi e valenti tedeschi facevano, non è possibile dire; lo sangue, gli uomini e’ cavalli che erano per terra, a pena si poteva passare e andare l’uno all’altro.” Thus, this source was most definitely not what Dante used to learn about the battle.

In 1267, Brunetto Latini began writing the second redaction for his French Li Livres Dou Tresor, adding more contemporary history to his encyclopedia, bringing the
events up to the year 1268, including the Guelphs’ return to power. Latini’s *Tresor* must be considered as an extremely likely source for Dante’s historical knowledge, because not only was Dante intimately familiar with his work and a great admirer of his, but also Latini himself was involved in the politics of the Battle of Montaperti. Latini had been sent on an embassy to the recently elected Emperor, King Alfonso the Wise, then in Seville. Latini tells us in his *Tesoretto* that he learned of the Ghibelline victory at Montaperti and his subsequent exile from Florence at the Pass of Roncesvalles, when a student coming from Bologna told him the news. He spent the next six years in exile in France, where he wrote the first redaction of his *Tresor*, and did not return to Florence until after 1266, when Manfred was killed at the Battle of Benevento. One would think that Latini’s knowledge of the battle that sent him into exile would be rife with historic detail, but it seems as though his lack of participation limited the battle to only a mere mention in his *Livres Dou Tresor*:

> When [Urban IV] was installed in his See as the vicar of Jesus Christ on Earth, he thought of the fact that Manfred had occupied through his tyranny the kingdoms of Sicily and Apulia… and that the year before he had been made pope, Manfred’s men entered Tuscany and expelled Florentine Guelfs from the city and the region.

Urban IV became Pope in 1261, which means “the year before” would be 1260, the year of Montaperti. *Li Livres Dou Tresor* was translated into Tuscan within a few years of its

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184 This comes from an English translation of the original French text of the *Tresor*. Ibid, 59.
completion. It was long thought that Bono Giamboni did the vernacularization of the work, the *Tesoro*, but it has been proven that that is not the case, and the translator remains anonymous. The Italian textual history of the *Tresor* translations are hopelessly complicated by later versions, which added more historical material and diverged from straight translation. I quote here the same entry from the pseudo-Bono Giamboni version:

> Manfredi… fece egli molte guerre, e diverse persecuzioni contra a tutti quelli d’Italia che si teneano con santa Chiesa, e contra a questa partita di Firenze, tanto che ellino furo cacciati di loro terra, e le loro case furon messe a fuoco ed a fiamma e a distruzione. E con loro fu cacciato mastro Brunetto Latini, ed allora se ne andò egli per quella guerra si come egli dice nel prologo.\(^1\)

This version adds the extra information about the damage done to Guelph houses after their expulsion and also talks about Brunetto in the third person, narrating his subsequent exile. However, neither of the two versions could have served as Dante’s source for information about the battle, as Montaperti is merely relegated to a few words.

Thomas Tuscus, a Franciscan friar from Pavia, saw the success of Martin of Troppau’s *Chronicon* and tried his hand at his own history of the papacy and empire when he wrote *Gesta imperatorum et pontificum* between 1279 and 1285.\(^2\) He derived much information from Martin of Troppau but added his own contributions on Florentine news at the end. The chronicle covers the years 1106 to 1278. Tuscus’ work, written in Latin, was not very popular, but Villani does say he uses Tuscus’ work several times.

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185 *Il Tesoro*, 292.
However, scholars are unsure if he really had that work in hand or a different work also used by Tuscus.\textsuperscript{187}

Tuscus writes about both battles with the same amount of detail, something that is not necessarily true of other chroniclers of the time, as the Battle of Montaperti was seen as a much more serious defeat than Colle di Val d’Elsa. This seems to be because he was in Siena when the battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa took place: “Eram tunc ipse in civitate Senensi et tantus timor invaserat fugientes, ut ad civitatem non fugerent, sed ad alia loca diverterent…”\textsuperscript{188} The details he includes about the Battle of Montaperti are all surface level—numbers for how many fought, how many died and how many were taken prisoner. The only major players in the battle he mentions by name are Manfred, for sending his soldiers, and Conte Giordano, who led the army. He does, however, make mention that the Guelphs had traitors amongst their ranks.\textsuperscript{189} He does not mention Bocca degli Abati by name or even what his specific treachery was. The lack of any named Dantean characters precludes Tuscus’ work from being Dante’s source for the Battle of Montaperti, but Tuscus does name someone from the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa: Provenzano Salvani. He writes that Provenzano, who was “quasi Senensium dominus” was captured, killed and beheaded, but does not mention the legend about his head being the highest on the field. Because Dante also does not make any mention of that legend, which was quite popular in the zeitgeist of the time, Tuscus’ information could serve as a good source at least for what Dante knew about Provenzano’s death.

The next chronicle to mention the battles was mistakenly attributed to Petrarch for years. Scholars date it to the second half of the Duecento, as it was used by the writer of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{187} See Santini \textit{Quesiti e Ricerche}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Tuscus “Gesta Imperatorum,” 523.
\item \textsuperscript{189} “Multi etiam ex eis suorum facti sunt proditores et quod est gravius percussores” (Ibid, 519).
\end{itemize}
the pseudo-Brunetto-Latini chronicle, which was written at the very latest in the first few years of the Trecento. There were several printed editions, the first in 1479 under the title *Vite dei Pontefici e Imperatori Romani*. However, the printed editions are not genuine representations of the text, because the beginning has been changed completely, and in many other places there are interpolations taken from Riccobaldo da Ferrara’s *Compilatio chronologica*. The oldest Florentine manuscript of the text is the Bisconiano 3 at the Biblioteca Laurenziana, from the 15th century. Because the work is divided up by the lives of popes and emperors, one must look at the entry for Pope Alexander IV, who was Pope during the Battle of Montaperti, and Pope Gregory X, who died in 1268 but is the closest Pope to the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa, in order to find information on the battles. Unfortunately, while the battles are indeed mentioned, the entries, which cover not just the battles but entire papacies, are relegated to a page or a few pages, with not nearly enough detail to serve as Dante’s source.

The *Cronica* of Salimbene de Adam was written perhaps contemporaneously to the pseudo-Petrarch, for which we have no precise date. Salimbene, a Franciscan friar and a follower of Joachim de Fiore, began writing his work around 1282 and had to have finished it before his death in 1290. It covers the years 1167-1287 and was most certainly one of Dante’s historical sources for other information. However, Salimbene’s coverage of the Battle of Montaperti is paltry. He says that Florence and Lucca were confident in their numbers and strength, but when the Sienese met them in battle, they were betrayed by their own forces. “For at the very beginning of the battle some of the...

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191 See Chapter 3 of this thesis for more examples of Dante’s use of Salimbene’s chronicle.
chief men of Florence turned against their own and began killing them.”\footnote{192} Once again, Bocca degli Abati is not mentioned by name, but the fact that betrayal was to blame for the Florentine loss and not the superior skill of the German forces is starting to pick up steam. It is mentioned here, in the pseudo-Petrarch, and in Thomas Tusculus. There has been no named perpetrator of the betrayal up to this point, nor any mention of the specific act of betrayal, namely cutting off the hand of the standard-bearer. We can safely rule out Salimbene’s chronicle as Dante’s source for the Battle of Montaperti, as it contains none of the singular details picked up by the poet.

One chronicle that proved promising due to the author’s contemporaneity with Villani is the \textit{Croniche della città di Firenze} by Paolino Pieri.\footnote{193} Pieri wrote down the events of the city in the style of annals from 1080 to 1305. He was a direct observer of the events from the year 1270 onward. The editors of the first critical edition of Pieri’s \textit{Croniche}, which just came out in 2013, believe the chronicle was written around 1302. It only survives in one manuscript, the Magliabechiano XXV.260 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (second quarter of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century), and since it ends abruptly in 1305, the authors believe pages from the only copy could have fallen out. Pieri’s chronicle shows a resemblance to the chronicle of the Magliab. XXV.505, the commentary of the Anonimo fiorentino and Simone della Tosa’s annals, which are all posterior to him. Pieri’s identity is still unclear. Villani refers to a Paolo di Piero, who was a master of astronomy, and there’s evidence in Pieri’s others works that he had a knowledge of astronomy. If we accept that he’s that astronomy master, he would have lived around 1270 to 1345. Pieri often refers to his own sources and uses \textit{costui, egli} and

quello to allude to one of the source’s authors, but the editors of the critical edition, Natascia Tonelli and Simone Giusti, do not know who that might be. Tonelli and Giusti find many overlapping characters and facts between Pieri’s chronicle and the Comedy but explain away the similarities to the two authors living at the same time when it would have been normal to write about popes, kings, emperors and eminent personalities: “Si tratta (ovviamente) di affinità esterne, generate dalla coincidenza cronologica dei fatti descritti. Non ci sono contatti tra i due testi, né tantomeno tra i due autori.”\textsuperscript{194} Interestingly, the editors find the identification of a character who is mentioned in a passage of the Croniche but is not named by Pieri in one of Dante’s cantos. Pieri refers to a man in Brescia who falsified gold florins and was burned at the stake for it; one of the counts of Romena probably put him up to it. This alludes to Master Adamo, who Dante names and places in the 10\textsuperscript{th} bolgia.\textsuperscript{195}

Pieri’s chronicle, as seems to be the trend, touches on Montaperti very briefly. He recounts the skirmish at Santa Petronilla that prompted Manfred to send more soldiers.\textsuperscript{196} He does not go into great detail about what happened during the battle. He also refers to a betrayal by some of the Florentines against their own but does not name the betrayer or describe exactly what happened. He describes the fallout: the Guelphs leaving Florence on September 9 and the Ghibellines returning to the city on September 12.\textsuperscript{197} That’s the extent of his coverage. While he mentions certain families tied to our Dantean characters—the Uberti for example—he does not mention any of them by name or by

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, xx.
\textsuperscript{195} Dante’s knowledge of Master Adam will be discussed in Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid, 34.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid, 35.
deed. He does, however, talk about Guido Guerra’s involvement in the battle with Arezzo in 1255 and the Battle of Benevento in 1266, much like the *Gesta florentinorum* did.

A very minor work that deserves mention is the *Gesta lucanorum* written around 1304-1305 by an anonymous author. It covers the period from the middle of the 12th century to 1276, deriving from older annals now lost. The interest in this work would be that the Lucchesi also fought and lost in the Battle of Montaperti, so annals of that city would be more likely to go in-depth. While the entry for 1260 is extremely brief, only a few lines, we do get our first important identification for the betrayal at Montaperti:

“Questa isconfitta fu per certo tradimento, che fu tra Fiorentini, che messer Bocha delli Abatti taglio la mano al confalonieri di Firense.”

Neither the decisive moment in battle nor the perpetrator are described in any of the works prior to this one—it is always a very vague “tradimento.”

The annals of Tolomeo da Lucca (also known as Ptolemy of Lucca) are said to have derived some of their information from this anonymous *Gesta lucanorum*, though his annals went on to have much greater success. They were written in Latin, cover the years 1031 to 1303 and were finished in 1308. Tolomeo covers both of the battles but again only dedicates about a paragraph to each. From his entry on the Battle of Montaperti we learn that Arbia was the name of the valley (“vallis Arbiae”), a betrayal

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198 Ibid, 33.
199 Ibid, 38.
201 Ibid, 313.
202 Ibid, 313.
203 Ibid, 313.
205 Ibid, 313.
(“proditio”) was the reason for the Florentine and Lucchesi loss, and the part the Lucchesi played and what their losses were. None of the Dantean characters are mentioned by name. The only names we get, in fact, aside from Manfred’s, are of two unknown men: Marchionibus Malaspina and Federico Morovello, perhaps important within the Lucchesi army.\textsuperscript{204} As for the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa, there’s no mention of Provenzano or Sapia, as the description of the battle stays pretty surface-level. Tolomeo does, however, name Guido Novello among the leaders of those who fought on the Sienese side. This Guido Novello is not to be confused with Guido Novello da Polenta, whom Dante stayed with at his court in Ravenna until he died. The Guido Novello who fought at Colle di Val d’Elsa was born about 50 years earlier than the one who Dante stayed with and was one of the great leaders of the Ghibelline party. He was often Farinata’s partner in crime and fought in both of the battles with Siena. He even became the podestà of Florence after the victory at Montaperti and was named vicar of Tuscany by Manfred in 1264. Dante’s exclusion of him is quite suspicious as he was just as integral a player in the Florentine politics of that generation as Farinata or Tegghiaio, if not more.

The last source that could possibly have been utilized by Dante when he was writing the \textit{Inferno} and \textit{Purgatorio} is the compilation included in the Napoletana-Gaddiana codex. The authorship and originality of this work is tangled up with the works it copied from and added to. We know that the pseudo-Petrarch chronicle was written before the Napol-Gadd chronicle, because the latter copies from the former. We also know that the pseudo-Brunetto Latini copies from the Napol-Gadd, thus the Napol-Gadd was written before the pseudo-Latini chronicle. This places its composition somewhere

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid, 80.
after the late 13th century, when the pseudo-Petrarch was written, and probably before
1313, which is how late the events in the Gaddiana codex are narrated until. The compiler
probably had a copy of the pseudo-Petrarch in hand that had notes in the margins with
news about Florence and Tuscany that he then inserted into the text, which was very
common back then. It had to have had a wide dispersal, because it was used in the
pseudo-Brunetto Latini, and we know that the Ottimo Commento of the Commedia
specifically uses this codex’s information on Montaperti.

The Napol-Gadd codex follows much of the same pattern as all the chronicles
mentioned previously. The paragraph on Montaperti is short, about a half a page long,
and does not mention any of our Dantean characters by name. It does, however, mention
Manfred, Conte Giordano and Guido Novello. A vague “tradimento” is once again
alluded to: “certi traditori che erano tra li fiorentini,” though Bocca degli Abati is not
named as the perpetrator. No mention of Tegghiaio’s speech warning against the battle or
Farinata’s speech against the destruction of Florence is made. However, the codex’s
coverage of the Battle at Colle di Val d’Elsa does give key information found in the
Comedy, namely that Provenzano Salvani fought with the Sienese forces, that he was the
leader of the Sienese people and that he was beheaded in battle: “Provinzano Salvani
quasi capitano del popolo di Siena fue mozzo il capo.” Because this codex mentions a
Florentine betrayal but doesn’t name the culprit and gives Dante all the information he
would have needed about Provenzano’s death—importantly leaving out the legend of the
devil—we can see how similar it is to Thomas Tuscus’ work. This is very interesting,
because the compilers of the Napol-Gadd codex copy most heavily from the pseudo-
Petrarch. On the battle of Montaperti, the Napol-Gadd copies the pseudo-Petrarch almost
to the letter, except it adds this information about a betrayal among the Florentines, which it most likely pulled from Tuscus. It also pulls the information on Provenzano Salvani from Tuscus, as the pseudo-Petrarch does not give any information on him. Thus, the Napol-Gadd is no more likely a source for the Comedy than Tuscus’ work.

That covers all of the annals, encyclopedias, chronicles and compilations of chronicles of which we are currently aware up to the time when Dante was writing his Inferno and Purgatorio. What should be striking to the reader at this point is the lack of detail in these historical sources. Because the battles were described briefly, usually in about a paragraph’s worth of text, there’s no room for details about what specific characters did during the battles or during the discussions that took place before or afterward, or even just the names of those who participated. The only name that is mentioned in every single chronicle is Manfred’s, and he wasn’t even at Montaperti. After Manfred, Conte Giordano gets named the most, yet Dante does not include him anywhere in the Comedy. We have no mention of Tegghiaio trying to dissuade his comrades from fighting, no mention of Farinata even participating in the battle, let alone his speech at Empoli that prevents the destruction of Florence, no mention of Sapia or Cavalcante or of the peacemaking effort of marrying Cavalcante’s son to Farinata’s daughter. We have several chronicles that report a betrayal within the ranks of the Florentine army, but we are not even told that these were secret Ghibellines pretending to be Guelphs, nor that the moment in which these men turned on their own was the moment the hand of the standard-bearer was cut off, and the only mention of Bocca degli
Abati being the one to do so is in the *Gesta lucanorum*, which, because we know little about its circulation during Dante’s time, is still an uncertain possibility.  

Thus, all of the historical sources written and published before Dante wrote his poem are insufficient to explain Dante’s knowledge of the battles with Siena. The *Comedy* is the next work in line if we keep working chronologically forward through time. After the *Comedy* comes Villani’s *Nuova Cronica*. Sorting out the relationship between Villani and Dante is extremely complicated. However, for the purposes of this chapter, we will look a bit more in depth at how the *Comedy* and the *Nuova Cronica* are tangled up with each other, why it is important to resolve, and how their works may or may not have influenced the chronicles that came afterward.

Villani’s relationship to Dante is a vital element in understanding Dante’s historical sources for three reasons: 1) If Villani and Dante knew each other, they could have shared information with each other, 2) If the composition of the *Nuova Cronica* and the three cantiche of the *Divine Comedy* were sorted out properly, we could tell if Dante had access to Villani’s text or vice versa, 3) Because they lived contemporaneously to each other, we can learn a lot about what sources Dante would have used based on the sources Villani directly tells us he used. We will begin with the assertion that Dante and Villani knew each other, some scholars and commentators maintaining that they were actually friends. The greatest evidence for their friendship stems from the fact that

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205 According to Bernhard Schmeidler, one of the surviving manuscripts ended up in Florence in the Biblioteca Nazionale: Palatinus 571. However, this manuscript was likely completed in the mid-14th century, as it continues the entries up to the year 1347. The other manuscripts are all located in Lucca. Codex 927 at the Biblioteca Pubblica di Lucca was a transcription of an older manuscript that could have circulated during Dante’s time. See Anonymous. “Due Gesta Lucanorum.” *Die Annalen Des Tholomeus Von Lucca in Doppelter Fassung, Nebst Teilen Der Gesta Florentinorum Und Gesta Lucanorum*. Ed. Schmeidler, Bernhard, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, Nova Series. Berlin, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1930, pp. 278-283.

Giovanni Villani’s nephew, Filippo, who was a public reader of Dante in Florence, wrote in his commentary to the *Inferno* that his uncle and Dante were friends. In 1891 Vittorio Imbriani wrote a book, *Studi Danteschi*, in which he maintains that it was impossible for Dante and Villani to be friends for the following reasons: 1) Villani only knows superficial things about Dante’s life, things that were already known and accepted by public opinion, nothing special or anecdotal; 2) Villani himself never says he knew Dante, let alone that they shared a friendship; 3) The age difference between Dante and Villani was too great for them to have been friends.\(^\text{207}\) In 1904, Arnaldo Della Torre refuted two of these arguments by claiming that Villani would not remember any specific memories about Dante because their friendship would have ended at least 20 years earlier, when Dante was exiled.\(^\text{208}\) He also would have wanted to use the information about the poet that was the most widespread.\(^\text{209}\) Della Torre argues that this 20-year interval in their friendship would have weakened Villani’s memories of Dante and he would not necessarily think to write “era un mio amico e conoscente” when writing about an old friend he had not heard from in a long time.\(^\text{210}\) Della Torre thinks that Villani makes enough of an effort at alluding to their friendship when he writes, “Questo Dante fu onorevole e antico cittadino di Firenze di Porta San Piero, e nostro vicino” (X,136). Imbriani believes “vicino” just means Dante was from the same city as Villani, but Della Torre thinks this means they were from the same *sesto* and so most certainly would have known each other. As for the age difference, we know that Dante was born in


\(^{208}\) Della Torre, Arnaldo. “L’amicizia di Dante e Giovanni Villani.” *Giornale dantesco*, vol. 12, 1904, pp. 33-44 (See p. 34).

\(^{209}\) Ibid, 35.

\(^{210}\) Ibid, 36.
1265 and Villani either in 1276 or 1280, which means Villani was either 11 or 15 years younger than Dante. Della Torre thinks you can be friends with people who are much older than you, whether they are your teacher, your colleague, or a friend of your parents. Despite all the back and forth, both scholars were arguing merely on a theoretical level. The fact remains there is no solid evidence beyond hearsay to prove that Dante and Villani knew each other.

Scholars have been fascinated by the dates of composition for both the Divine Comedy and the Nuova Cronica for years, because had the Cronica been circulating early enough, even in partial form, Dante may have used it as a source of historical information in his Comedy. Alternatively, whenever Villani actually sat down to write his text, he could have been influenced by Dante’s choice of historical subjects that he placed into the Comedy. Villani says in his second preface that he began composing his chronicle after the jubilee of 1300 (IX, 36). This overt reference to the date of Dante pilgrim’s journey cannot be ignored; neither can Villani’s wording about Florence’s rise and Rome’s fall, in the same preface, which seems to echo Dante’s Par. 25.109-111. Though Villani purports to have begun composing his chronicle in the jubilee year, it is highly unlikely that he actually did because of his extended stay in Bruges (1302-1308) and statements within the Cronica that demonstrate knowledge of events after 1320. After years of scholarship, we now know that the Inferno was circulating around 1315, the Purgatorio around 1319, and the Paradiso from 1321 onward. Louis Green’s thesis regarding the composition dates of the Cronica has now been widely accepted. Green makes the case that Villani began collecting material and taking extensive notes as early as 1300 but only began making length daily entries after 1322. Green maintains that
Villani only finished his final draft between 1333 and 1346. Thus, we must conclude that Dante did not know Villani’s chronicle, not even in draft form. Rala Diakité, who edited the English translation of the last book of the Cronica, concludes: “To speak in broad terms, we can probably say that when Villani had begun the most intensive period of composition, the Comedy would have been in circulation for more than fifteen years.” We’ve always known that Villani had a strong familiarity with the Comedy, because he cites it directly on multiple occasions. However, it is not possible for Villani to have used the Comedy as a historical source, because Dante’s historical allusions, by the very nature of them being written in terzinas in a work of poetry, are, if anything, condensed versions of Villani’s much more detailed accounts. For Villani to have used Dante as his record of history, he would have had to invent details that were not present in the Comedy in order to flush them out, and we know Villani was too careful a historiographer to do so.

The only question we can ask about Dante and Villani’s relationship to each other in regards to the historical information that both of their works contain is whether they used the same secondary source. While Dante’s sources of historical information have not been enough of a draw to elicit mountains of scholarship on the topic, the same cannot be said for Villani’s sources. Scholars of history will always be concerned with a history writer’s sources. We know that Villani’s five main sources for Italian and

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212 Furthermore, Salvemini believes that if Dante had used the Cronica, he most certainly would have alluded to it in the Comedy (242).


European history were 1) a version of either the *Chronica de Origine Civitatis* or the *Libro Fiesolano*, 2) Martin of Troppau’s *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum*, 215 3) Riccoldo of Montecroce’s chronicle about the Middle East, 4) the pseudo-Brunetto-Latini chronicle and Latini’s *Li livres dou tresor*, 5) the lost *Gesta florentinorum* reconstructed by Schmeidler. 216 Giuseppe Porta, who edited the most recent critical edition of the *Cronica*, adds that Villani must have used numerous other Florentine chronicles that were destroyed in one of the frequent fires that he refers to in his chronicle. 217 But Villani was a skilled early historian, so he did not just rely on other writers’ chronicles. He also consulted “ordinances, reforms, civil and criminal suits, property documents, tax records, diplomatic documents, trade agreements, and so forth, as well as correspondence with clerics, scholars and merchants, oral accounts and his own eyewitness account of events” 218 Finally, Villani used the *Liber extimationum*, which detailed the damages done to Guelph property after their loss at Montaperti.

Aside from Riccoldo of Montecroce’s *Liber Peregrinacionis*, which doesn’t enter into the discussion because of its exclusive dealings with the East, all of the chronicles consulted by Villani have already been examined in this chapter. The *Chronica de Origine Civitatis* or *Libro Fiesolano* only cover the legendary origins of Florence; Martin of Troppau’s *Chronicon* skips over the Battle of Montaperti; the *Gesta florentinorum* and *Tresor* do not describe Montaperti’s events in enough detail to have served as Dante’s source; and the pseudo-Brunetto-Latini chronicle is missing the years 1241-1285. Thus, the only known or surviving source that Dante and Villani could have both consulted

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216 Used for Villani’s chapters that deal with the period from 1080 to 1278.
217 *Nuova cronica*, vii-viii.
218 Diakité *New Chronicle*, 5.
would have to have been a government document or private correspondence. In comparison to the chroniclers, Dante’s knowledge of the battles with Siena is more narrative-driven: where the battles took place, who tried to prevent them from happening, who tried to prevent the destruction of Florence, who prayed for a loss, who died in the battles. Dante doesn’t need to name all of the commanders of the Florentine and Sienese armies or know the dates of the principal events, or the number of total soldiers in each army, the number of losses on the battlefield, or the number of prisoners taken. He is not writing history; he stumbled upon real people’s lives, real people’s stories, and he was inspired to follow them into the afterlife. The details that interest him are the details that make up a human life—sin, bravery, tragedy—not how much grain the Church dispatched to the Florentine army. The reason I find Dante’s use of government documents (for example, the Liber extimationum or the Libro di Montaperti) unconvincing is the same reason I find his interrogation of witnesses to the battles unconvincing. That amount of research is beyond the scope of his project. Dante also would have lost access to Florentine documents once he was exiled, adding an extra barrier to his ability to gather information via government documents.

But the contents of Villani’s Cronica cannot be ignored. He may not have been Dante’s source, but he names every single character involved in the battles with Siena that Dante names except for Sapìa de’ Saracini. Of the chronicles previous to Dante’s composition of the Comedy that were explored in this chapter, some 10 total, not a single Dantean character was mentioned by name except for Bocca degli Abati in the Gesta lucanorum. No chronicle is published between Dante’s composition of the Comedy and
Villani’s composition of the Cronica that offers sufficient detail for the battles,\textsuperscript{219} and yet Villani’s Cronica is filled with elaborate detail, down to quotations from the very discussions had by Farinata and Tegghiaio. We will now take a look at just how distinctly those details match up with Dante’s.

To begin, Villani devotes about nine sections of his seventh book to the Battle of Montaperti, not only to the battle but also to the preparations leading up to it and to the repercussions of the Florentine loss. Already, we have a much more detailed account than any of the previous chroniclers who devoted a mere paragraph or even one line to the battle. Villani not only produces the exact events found within the Comedy but also adds even more details that are not present in the poem. For example, when Manfred offers to initially only send 100 German soldiers to Siena’s defense, the other ambassadors are offended, but Farinata degli Uberti convinces them not to refuse the help, no matter how small it is, advice that Villani refers to as “il savio consiglio del cavaliere” (VII, 74).\textsuperscript{220} He includes yet another episode involving Farinata in which he and Gherardo Ciccia de’ Lamberti attempt to trick the Florentine army. They send two Franciscan friars to tell the Florentines that they are so fed up with the signoria of Provenzano Salvani (“ch’era il maggiore del popolo di Siena”) that they would gladly give their city to the Florentines for 10,000 gold Florins (VII, 77). The inclusion of this episode is important for two

\textsuperscript{219} The chronicle contained in the manuscript Magliab. XXV. 505 at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze deserves mentioning here. According to Santini, it is the text that best resembles the lost Gesta Florentinorum. The surviving redaction is from the 14\textsuperscript{th} century but isn’t the original. The original had to be written in the first 30 years of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, because the last date given is 1321 and the news about the first 20 years of the century are pretty rich in detail, almost like personal memories. The chronicle covers both of the battles, but again the only person named as a participant besides Conte Giordano, Manfred and Charles of Anjou is Guido Novello, who Dante never talks about. Just like some of the other chronicles, Guido Guerra’s name is mentioned, but for his deeds in the battle against Arezzo in 1255 and the Battle of Benevento in 1266, where Manfred was killed. Thus, it could not have served as Villani’s source for information on Montaperti or Colle di Val d’ Elsa.

\textsuperscript{220} “Non vi sconfortate, e non rifiutiamo niuno suo aiuto, e sia piccolo quanto si vuole…”
reasons: First, we get the establishment that Provenzano is the *signore* or “sire” of Siena; second, the offer leads to a debate among Florentines whether to aid Montalcino as a means of entering Siena. Villani tells us that the nobles, among them Guido Guerra,\(^{221}\) knew that would be a huge risk, because they saw the Germans fight with great prowess, even though outnumbered, at Santa Petronilla and knew that many more had been dispatched by Manfred.\(^{222}\) The one person to stand up to the suggestion, on behalf of all the noble Guelph houses of Florence, was Tegghiaio Aldobrandi: “E ‘l dicitore fu per tutti messer Tegghiaio Aldobrandi degli Adimari, cavaliere savio e prode e di grande autoritade; e di largo consigliava il migliore.”\(^{223}\) Here, Villani finally gives us the man whose voice in the world above “dovria esser gradita” (*Inf.* 32.42). “E messer Tegghiaio gli rispuose ch’al bisogno non ardirebbe di seguirlo nella battaglia cola ov’egli si metterebbe.”\(^{224}\)

Villani then goes on to tell the story of the battle itself. Florence, against Tegghiaio’s advice, goes to war anyway and calls on its allies for help: Lucca, Bologna, Pistoia, Prato, Volterra, San Gimignano, and Colle di Val d’Elsa (VII, 78). The day of the battle, a man named Razzante, a Ghibelline still living in Florence, rides to Siena to let the Florentine exiles know that the Florentine army is very large and not to fight them.\(^{225}\) Farinata responds to him that if he were to spread that news throughout Siena and scare

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\(^{221}\) Villani describes the lineage of the Conti Guidi, including how Guido Novello turned on his family, including his Guelph cousin Guido Guerra, by turning to the Ghibelline party (Book VI, 37).

\(^{222}\) “I nobili de le gran case guelfe di Firenze, e ‘l conte Guido Guerra ch’era col loro, non sappiendo il falso trattato, e sapeano più di guerra che’ popolani, conoscendo la nuova masnada de’ Tedeschi ch’era venuta in Siena, e la mala vista che fece il popolo a Santa Petronilla, quando i cento Tedeschi gli asaliro, non parea loro la ‘mpresa sanza grande pericolo’ (*Nuova Cronica*, 375).

\(^{223}\) Ibid.

\(^{224}\) Ibid. Tegghiaio appears again in section 81 of Book VII and offers more sage advice, so Dante’s impression of him as being someone who people should’ve listened to more may not be based solely off of what he said at Montaperti.

\(^{225}\) Ibid, 377.
every man within and convince the Germans not to fight, the Ghibelline exiles would be
dead and would never return to Florence anyway, “e per noi farebbe meglio la morte e
de essere isconfitti, ch’andare più tapinando per lo mondo.”

Villani doesn’t attribute the Florentine loss that day completely to the betrayal of Bocca degli Abati—he says the Florentine army was commanded badly and did not get along—but he certainly tells Bocca’s story in full detail. He gives the name of Iacopo de’ Pazzi as the standard-bearer and says that Bocca, “ch’era in sua schiera e presso di lui, colla spade fedi il detto messer Iacopo e tagliogli la mano co la quale tenea la detta insegna, e ivi fu morto di presente.”

This is the only time that Villani mentions Bocca degli Abati in his entire chronicle. Villani reports that after this betrayal, the Florentines, seeing their flag fallen to the ground, betrayed by their own, were assaulted by the Germans and defeated within a few hours.

Villani also narrates the crucial meeting at Empoli and how Farinata saved Florence from destruction. In fact, section 81 of Book VII is called “Come i Ghibellini di Toscana ordinaron di disfare la città di Firenze, e come messer Farinata degli Uberti la difese.” Villani tells us that the purpose of the meeting between the Pisani, Sienese, Aretini, Count Giordano and the Florentine Ghibellines was to repair the state of the Ghibelline party in Tuscany. While there, everyone voted to not just destroy Florence, but burn it to the ground, so that it could never return to fame or power. Villani’s passage on how Farinata, “il valente e savio cavaliere,” dissuaded everyone follows:

… Nella sua diceria propuose gli antichi due grossi proverbi che dicono:

‘Com’asino sape, così minuzza rape’ e ‘Vassi capra zoppa, se ‘l lupo no lla
‘ntoppa;’ e questi due proverbi rinestò in uno, dicendo: ‘Com’asino sape, si va capra zoppa; così minuzza rape, se ‘l lupo no lla ‘ntoppa;’ recando poi con savie parole asempro e comparazioni sopra il grosso proverbio, com’era folia di ciò parlare, e come gran pericolo e danno ne potea avenire; e s’altri ch’egli non fosse, mentre ch’egli avesse vita in corpo, colla spada in mano la difenderebbe.\footnote{Ibid, 385-386.}

What Farinata intends with his two proverbs is that the “asino sape,” the weak and stupid, will never succeed in their intent from the moment Farinata opposes them with his sword, “se ‘l lupo non la ‘ntoppa.” Farinata is the wolf that is up against asses of limited intelligence and lame goats. Conte Giordano, not wanting to start a war with his Florentine Ghibelline allies, does what Farinata wants and backs off on the destruction. Thus, Villani writes, “uno buono uomo cittadino scampò la nostra città di Firenze da tanta furia, distruggimento, ruina.”\footnote{Ibid, 386.} Villani then goes on to describe how ungrateful the Florentine people were toward Farinata and his descendants, exactly as the character of Farinata himself does in \textit{Inferno} 10 when he asks Dante, “Perché quel popolo è si empio/incontr’ a’ miei in ciascuna sua legge?” (83-84). Villani says those ungrateful people should remember Farinata as a good and virtuous citizen.\footnote{Ibid, 386-387.}

Villani mentions Farinata several more times in his \textit{Cronica}, but all of the information already given is enough to account for all of Dante’s knowledge about Farinata’s actions during the Battle of Montaperti. Not only do we get the fact that Farinata alone stood up to the Tuscan Ghibellines, we even get quotations from the speech he gave to dissuade them. Villani goes so far as to believe Farinata was willing to die to save his city from destruction, as his method of “dissuading” the others was to
threaten to fight them. The only other fact that would wrap things up for Dante’s historical knowledge of Farinata is a mention of the peacemaking efforts made between warring families in Florence, specifically the marriage of Guido Cavalcanti and Beatrice Farinata. Villani doesn’t skip over this historical fact either. In section 15 of Book VIII, Villani says that the Guelphs and Ghibellines were finally back in Florence together and “per trattato di pace… feciono fare tra lloro più matrimoni e parentadi…” Among the marriages arranged, Cavalcante de’ Cavalcanti gave his son, Guido, Farinata’s daughter as his wife, and Simone Donati gave his daughter to Farinata’s son, Azzolino, as his wife. This is, in fact, one of the only times Cavalcante Cavalcanti appears in Villani’s chronicle.

It was mentioned earlier that simply throwing Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini into canto 10 of *Inferno* along with Farinata, Frederick II and Cavalcante, does not necessarily associate him with the Battle of Montaperti—only with the Ghibelline party and the general factionalism of the generation of Dante’s father. However, it is interesting to note that Villani takes us inside the papal court at the time of the battle. In Book VII, 80, he recounts the arrival of the news of the Guelph defeat to the papal court. He says that “Cardinal Attaviano degli Ubaldini ch’era Ghibellino ne fece gran festa.” But when Cardinal Bianco sees Ottaviano celebrating, he makes a prophecy and says that if Ottaviano knew the future of the wars between the Florentines, he wouldn’t be celebrating so much, alluding to the future of the Ghibellines in Florence, who would not have a happy ending.

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231 Ibid, 437.
232 Ibid, 383.
Finally, though Villani does not cover the battle at Colle di Val d’Elsa in as great of detail as he does Montaperti, we do get Provenzano Salvani’s participation in it as well as a brief bio of him. In Book VIII, 31 Villani details how the Florentines defeated the Sienese at Colle—the Sienese with their German and Spanish allies, the Florentines with their French allies. He tells of Provenzano’s death that day, that he was taken, beheaded, and then his head was paraded around on a lance through the Campo di Siena. Villani also tells the legend of how the Devil told Provenzano his head would be the highest on the field that day, which Provenzano mistakenly understood that he would win the battle, not that he would be decapitated. Villani writes that Provenzano, “è grande uomo in Siena al suo tempo dopo la vittoria ch’ebbono a Monte Aperti, e guidava tutta la città, e tutta parte ghibellina di Toscana facea capo di lui, e era molto presuntuoso di sua volontà.” From this passage, Dante could glean that Provenzano fought at Montaperti and that his power in Siena grew subsequently, that he died in the battle at Colle, and that he was the signore of the whole city, which happily followed his will. However, this is the second time the legend about Provenzano and the Devil has been written about—the first being Thomas Tuscus—and the imagery seems rife for Dantean appropriation. The image of a man so proud he believed the Devil that his head would be the highest on the battlefield, so arrogant he couldn’t even fathom defeat juxtaposed perfectly with the broken soul weighed down by boulders on the Terrace of Pride. It does not seem likely that Dante would have ignored the pure poetry of that juxtaposition.

233 “Anderei e combatterai, vincerai non, morrai alla battaglia, e la tua testa fia la più alta del campo” (Ibid, 464). Provenzano does not hear the pause correctly so instead of “vincerai non—morrai,” he hears, “vincerai—non morrai” and believes he will be victorious.

234 Ibid, 464.
While it must be noted that Villani does not write about Sapia at all and does not recount the story of Provenzano begging for money in the square, his chronicle accounts for every other historical fact related to the two battles with Siena that Dante includes in his *Comedy*. Villani’s chronicle tell us that Farinata is not the only leader involved in orchestrating Montaperti, as it goes into great detail about the others involved as well. He too mentions the name of the Arbia River. He cites the massive numbers of men dead or taken prisoner. He recounts Farinata’s speech at Empoli word for word. He names Bocca degli Abati as the traitor amongst the Florentine ranks and also the man whose hand he cut off, Iacopo de’ Pazzi, who not even Dante names. He even mentions Guido Guerra’s involvement in Montaperti, the first to do so among all the chronicles considered thus far. He tells us of the events involving the two Franciscan friars that lead up to Tegghiaio Aldobrandi’s speech in which he advises the Florentines not to engage Siena in battle, and then once again gives us Tegghiaio’s actual speech in quotations. He even covers the marriage between Farinata’s daughter and Guido Cavalcanti, though that historical fact does not necessitate Dante reading it in a secondary source, as he could have learned that from being friends with Guido Cavalcanti. Villani is clear that Provenzano was the *de facto* ruler of Siena and mentions his involvement in both the Battle of Montaperti and the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa. He gives us a brief biography of Provenzano, alluding to his efforts at consolidating power.

Villani covers it all. If we can accept a hypothesis that Dante learned about Sapia and about Provenzano begging in the town square from actually traveling to Siena and

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235 He tells of other deeds with the sword of Guido Guerra as well. Like the other chronicles discussed, Villani also details Guerra’s involvement in the Battle at Arezzo (Book VII, 61) and Benevento (Book VIII, 8), as well as some new ones: the taking of San Germano (Book VIII, 6) and his being made captain in Parma by the French (Book VIII, 4).
talking to their descendants, then Villani’s chronicle would theoretically suffice as the sole historical record needed for Dante to write his verses on the battles. The problem is that it is simply not possible. The chronology of the composition of the two works does not allow for this explanation. For a long time, scholars believed the problem was solved, because they attributed Ricordano Malispini’s chronicle as the source Dante and Villani held in common. But when Charles Davis proved that the Malispini chronicle was a late-14th-century forgery, that theory was put to bed once and for all.

That leaves us with a gaping hole in history. No source before Dante contains enough detail about these battles for Dante to have depended on it, and Dante is the last source before Villani. But Villani, while he has the same facts, has so much more detail than Dante. Thus, the only way Dante could be his source is if he took Dante’s facts and fleshed them out into full stories with his own imagination, which is not something a historian of his caliber is likely to do or in many cases is even able to do. Consider how Villani would have been able to figure out that Farinata’s daughter and Cavalcante’s son were married just because the two men were placed next to each other in the Cemetery of the Epicureans. That would be ludicrous. And it is not something Dante made up, either. It is a fact that has been verified by modern historians who researched surviving government documents. If Dante can’t be Villani’s source, then was the information about Montaperti and Colle di Val d’Elsa just circulating by word of mouth in such detail as to be memorized then written down with specificity at least 40 years after the battles took place? Can we really rely solely on an oral tradition that hasn’t come down to us to explain away all of these mysteries? Dante wrote one hundred cantos. In these cantos, he includes 253 real people. Could he really have learned their stories from a song or from
town gossip, stored information about all of their biographies in his memory, and called all of that information back up when he sat down to write decades after the majority of them had lived? It only seems possible via the transformation of oral into written history. Another possible solution to the problem, but perhaps one that is too pat, is that there existed another written source that predated both Dante and Villani, but it is now lost to us, probably burned in one of Florence’s many fires.

The mystery needs to be resolved. These historical facts transmitted first by Dante and then by Villani had lasting effects. Almost all of the chronicles that come out in the late 14th century and early 15th century pick up the same details of the battles. We will take a look at just two of the most widespread, one a Sienese chronicle, the other a Florentine. The Florentine chronicle comes to us from Marchionne di Coppo Stefani and narrates events up to 1378, so it is only a few decades posterior to Villani. Niccolo Rodolico, the author of its critical edition, says that Stefani consulted both the chronicle of Martin of Troppau and of Villani but may have consulted others as well that he does not cite. The Sienese chronicle is called Cronaca senese, attributed to Paolo di Tommaso Montauri, and came out about 50 years after Stefani’s. It narrates events from 1170-1315 and from 1381-1432. While the original manuscript disappeared, a critical edition was made from a 1490 copy in the Biblioteca degli Intronati di Siena, codex A. VII. 44.

For a complete discussion as to whether this chronicle could have been composed even earlier by Coppo Stefani, Marchionne’s father, and thus could have served as Villani and Dante’s source, see the introduction to Niccolo Rodolico’s critical edition of the work, Stefani, Marchionne di Coppo. “Cronaca Fiorentina.” Rerum Italicarum Scriptores. Ed. Rodolico, Niccolo, vol. 30, 2nd edition, Città di Castello, 1903, pp. 21-23. While there’s a lot of evidence for both sides of the argument, Rodolico eventually concludes that there’s no way Coppo had anything to do with the chronicle, which was solely authored by Marchionne post-Villani.


Alessandro Lisini, the editor of the critical edition, states that the part between 1315 and 1381 is not original to the work and contains facts that cannot be found in any other known chronicles, so he left it out.
Though Montauri, who came from a family of goldsmiths and died in 1495, is referred to as the author and will be for the rest of this chapter, he may have only been a compiler and perhaps one of many. The copyist of codex A.VII.44 says he received the manuscript from Montauri but doesn’t call him the author, and the way the manuscript is put together, it would seem more of a collection of information written down at various times by various people. There’s even suspicion it wasn’t written by a Sienese.\textsuperscript{239}

Stefani covers the same major events of the battle Villani does: Farinata advising the Sienese to take the paltry 100 soldiers initially offered by Manfred, the skirmish outside Santa Petronilla, which sparks Manfred to send even more soldiers, the deception devised by Farinata and Gherardo de’ Lamberti to make the Florentines think the Sienese did not want Provenzano Salvani as their ruler anymore, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, who is described by Stefani as a “uomo di grande senne ed in arme sperto più che altro da Firenze,” advising the Florentines not to attack just yet and no one listening to him,\textsuperscript{240} Razzante sneaking in to tell the Ghibellines in Siena that the Florentine army outnumbered them, and Bocca degli Abati cutting off Iacopo de’ Pazzi’s hand, causing the Florentines’ defeat.\textsuperscript{241} He too gives a brief bio of Provenzano Salvani who he says “quasi tutti soggiogava, come signore.”\textsuperscript{242} He also says Provenzano’s power grew as a result of Montaperti: “Messer Provenzano Salvani da Siena, dappoichè ebbe sconfitti a

\textsuperscript{239} The compiler uses “vuomini” instead of “uomini” and “felmine” instead of “femmine,” for example.
\textsuperscript{240} To Tegghiaio’s speech, Stefani adds that the reason Tegghiaio is advising they wait is because he thinks the German army has only been paid for so long and their time’s about to run out: “‘Che la gente ch’era in Siena tedesca era gente di gran valore, e gli amici de’ Sanesi potrebbero far gente assai, e se Monte Alcino si vuole soccorrere, gli Orbetani si sono vantati con poca cosa soccorrerli e fornirlo, e così terrete a bada; gli uomini del re Manfredi sono pagati per tre mesi e già n’erano iti due, se stiamo questo mese in sulla guardia, non avremo nostro attento ch’eglino si partiranno; che i Ghibellini sono poveri e di Sanesi non hanno di che pagare, e non vorranno, di che subito si leveranno’” (“Cronaca Fiorentina,” 46-47).
\textsuperscript{241} “Messer Iacopo de’ Pazzi tenea in mano la insegna del Popolo di Firenze… messer Bocca Abati essendogli allato nell’oste de’ Fiorentini trasse la spade e tagliogli la mano; di che la bandiera fe’ cadere in terra. Allora fu la battaglia grande, ed abbattuta la insegna ognuno cominciò a fuggire” (Ibid, 47).
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid, 46.
Monte Aperti i Fiorentini, se era prima un gran maestro, allora diventò quasi signore di Siena e di tutta la lega di parte ghibellina. Provenzano finds the same sad end that he did in Villani’s chronicle when he’s decapitated at the Battle of Colle, his head paraded around on a lance. Stefani includes the same Devil legend as well. The only event Stefani is missing is Farinata defending Florence at the meeting at Empoli, and since his facts almost follow Villani’s exactly, this would almost seem to be purposely edited out.

The Montauri chronicle is a very partisan account told from the Sienese side of things, so the “miracle” bestowed upon Siena by the Virgin Mary after praying to her for victory is mentioned and much blame is thrown Florence’s way for wasting the Sienese contado and breaking the peace accord for no reason. Despite the more overt partisanship, Montauri still touches on the same events Villani does and even at one point references his reliance on Villani: “Anco scriviamo unto tratato el quale è stato scritto per Giovani Vilani fiorentino, el quale trata di questa materia.” He narrates the same discussions among the Florentines about whether or not to attack in a very similar way to Villani, saying that the Florentine nobles, like Guido Guerra, knew more about war than the popolani, but he changes Tegghiaio’s speech a bit. His presentation of Tegghiaio’s speech is very similar to Stefani’s, where he tells them not to attack precisely because he believes the German soldiers have half the time they’ve been paid for left and if they just wait it out, they’ll all return home to Apulia. Strangely, though, he adds that the Sienese and the exiles will go to prison. Montauri then seems to cut back to what was going on in Siena at that very moment and narrates the entire procession through the town led by Buonaguida Lucari, drawing heavily on the narration contained in La Sconfitta di Monte Aperti.

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243 Ibid, 53.
244 “Cronaca Senese,” 196.
245 Ibid, 197.
Aperto. Montauri focuses on the Sienese decision about what to do with Montalcino, which is a heavy focus of the fallout for all of the Sienese-written chronicles. Thus, rather than focus on Florentine characters like Farinata and what he was saying at Empoli, he focuses on Provenzano Salvani and what he said to persuade the Sienese to punish the Montalcinesi for rebelling against them. As for Provenzano, he meets the same end in Montauri’s chronicle as well: his head on a lance, decapitated by Cavolino Tolomei after the Battle at Colle. Sapia is not mentioned here nor in Stefani’s chronicle, just as she is not in Villani’s. Thus the only critical scene missing from Montauri’s chronicle is Farinata’s defense of Florence at Empoli, just as it is missing in Stefani’s.

What should be clear from Stefani and Montauri’s chronicles (which are not outliers among their contemporaries) is how much greater detail is given to the battles between Florence and Siena—all the strategies leading up to the battle, the skirmishes, the diplomatic missions, the deceptions and negotiations, the crucial moments of battle, and, of course, the fallout. This is a trend that continues from Villani onward. That is, all of these little details were left out of every chronicle written before Dante’s Comedy. Then, they were included in the Comedy but in a very condensed way. Then, they were fleshed out completely in Villani’s Cronica, who is copied almost to the letter by every chronicler who comes after him. Thus, this puts Dante and Villani’s authorial relationship to each other at the crux of Italian historiography of the 13th and 14th centuries. Whatever happened around the turn of the 14th century, wherever their information came from, it would shape the writing of the history of the battles of Montaperti and Colle di Val

246 Ibid, 218.
247 Ibid, 224.
d’Elsa for many years to come. The mystery of their common source may never reveal itself to us, as it most likely disappeared a long time ago.
CHAPTER 3: The Sicilian Dynasties

The case of Montaperti presented a microcosm of Dante’s study of recent history. It was one event, that occurred on one day, with just a handful of principal characters involved, and it was highly localized, an event that was mostly of importance to the people of Tuscany. The present chapter, however, spans time and space, widening Dante’s knowledge of recent history to a macroscopic scale. This chapter deals with the various dynasties that ruled Sicily between the 11th and 14th centuries, starting with the Normans, followed by the Swabians, and ending with the Aragonesi, all of whom were connected either through blood or marriage—one long family saga, if you will. While this expands Dante’s knowledge of history in terms of geography (as Sicily is quite a distance from Florence), it also moves us from the local political stage to the politics of the two larger forces asserting their influence on Dante’s Italy—the Papacy and the Empire. For, as we will come to see, the most imposing figure from this chapter is that of the Emperor Frederick II, whose physical appearance in the Comedy may be brief, but whose impact is monumental.

The ancestors of Frederick who appear in the Comedy include Robert Guiscard (“the Cunning,” 1015-1085), the leader of the house of Hauteville who fought against Muslims in southern Italy to conquer Sicily for the Norman kingdom, William II (“the Good, 1153-1189), the king of Naples and Sicily in the Norman line whose death was lamented by the Sicilians, and the Empress Constance (1154-1198), who was William II’s aunt and the rightful heiress to the Norman house of Hauteville upon his death.248 Constance is the reason the kingdom of Sicily passed into the hands of the house of

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248 Constance was challenged, however, by her nephew Tancred of Lecce, who was the illegitimate son of her brother, Roger of Apulia, and whom Pope Clement III favored as a means of keeping the kingdom of Sicily out of imperial hands.
Hohenstaufen, as Emperor Frederick Barbarossa had contracted her in marriage to his son, Henry VI, who was at the time duke of Swabia. Henry was crowned emperor in 1191, which officially folded the kingdom of Sicily into the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick II was born to Constance and Henry, the heir to both of their kingdoms.

Frederick II ruled the Holy Roman Empire from 1220 until his death in 1250, but Dante follows his royal descendants all the way up to 1300, when the Comedy takes place. Besides Frederick, we meet Manfred, Frederick’s illegitimate son and the King of Sicily from 1258 to 1266. Though not physically in any realms of the afterlife, we learn about several other descendants of Frederick, including Conrading, Frederick’s grandson and the King of Sicily from 1254 to 1268, Constance II (still alive in 1300), Manfred’s daughter and Queen of Sicily and Aragon through her marriage to Peter III of Aragon. We also meet Peter III in Purgatory and learn of his sons with Constance: Pedro, Alfonso, Frederick and James, who were all ruling during Dante’s adulthood. In addition to Frederick’s descendants, several of the members of Frederick’s court are present in the Comedy: Pier delle Vigne, Frederick’s chancellor and advisor, Michael Scot, Frederick’s astrologer, and Guido Bonatti, also an astrologer and advisor. In addition, we meet Asdente, a soothsayer from Parma who made several prophecies about Frederick.

Frederick’s presence looms large within the tapestry of the Comedy as a whole, as all of these characters are spread out among each cantica of the poem. It was the very rule of the Hohenstaufen that split Italy along the party lines of Guelphs and Ghibellines, supporters of Pope or Emperor, which means that Dante’s presentation of these...
characters carries an inherent political charge.\textsuperscript{250} In fact, the association of the creation of the rival parties with the Hohenstaufen family was so strong that the 13\textsuperscript{th}-century chronicler Saba Malaspina (who will be discussed in detail in this chapter), himself a Guelph, wrote the following legend about the origin of the Guelphs and Ghibellines upon the night of Manfred’s birth:

\begin{quote}
… in Toscana apparvero nell’aria nuvolosa due figure di donne dagli occhi umani, che incombevano come nubi sulla terra, i cui nomi erano resi confusi dal suono quasi rauco di un gran tuono che rumoreggiava nel vuoto. Ma non a torto gli uomini in base a ciò che so poté distinguere, supposera che l’una potesse essere chiamata Ghibellina, l’altra Guelfa.\textsuperscript{251}
\end{quote}

Although anachronistic, the legend shows how divisive the Swabian line was in Italy. Malaspina goes on to write about the constant struggle between the two parties:

\begin{quote}
In tal modo si alternava la vittoria di entrambe, e d’oscillava di continuo la reciproca superiorità; nessuna delle due, per se calpestrata, era sottoposta a lunga alla seconda, e sovrapponendosi a sua volta un’altra, stava per poco in posizione di superiorità.\textsuperscript{252}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{250} Guelph comes from Welf, the name of the dukes of Bavaria who were the rivals to the Hohenstaufens of Swabia, whose castle was named “Wibellingen,” which subsequently became “Ghibellino” in Italian. The political association of these two names resulted from the Welf dynasty siding with the Pope during the Investiture Controversy, a power struggle between Pope Gregory VII and the Hohenstaufen Emperor Henry IV. The names came into vogue during the reign of Frederick I Barbarossa, Frederick II’s grandfather.

\textsuperscript{251} Malaspina, Saba. \textit{Storia delle cose di Sicilia (1250-1285)}. Trans. De Rosa, Francesco, Cassino, Francesco Ciolfi editore, 2014, p. 11. Malaspina’s chronicle was originally written in Latin (the De Rosa edition includes Latin-facing text), as were several other chronicles that will be discussed in this chapter. Because my knowledge of Latin is rudimentary, I have consulted either Italian or English translations of the original Latin whenever they were available. See the original Latin here: “super Tusciam in aëre nubigero comparuerunt humanis obtutibus, prendentes ut nebula super terram, quorum nomina vox magni tonitrui quasi rauca concavitate crepitantis verisimiliter confundebeat. Sed non vane hominum conjiciunt intellectus alteram, secundum quod discerni potuit, vocari posse Gebelliam, alteram vero Guelfam” (ibid, 10).

As has already been discussed in previous chapters, the chronicles and annals of Dante’s time tended toward bias and subjectivity, but never more so than when they wrote about the Sicilian dynasties and their complicated relationship with the Church. Therefore, the historical sources Dante turned to and trusted in to get his information about the royal families of Sicily tells us a lot about his political views, which, as we know, were in constant flux. Even more telling still are the details within those chronicles that Dante chooses to leave out, either out of a distrust in their validity or because they didn’t suit his political beliefs.

Before we establish what Dante knew about the Sicilian dynasties by locating the facts within the *Comedy* itself, it is necessary to establish a brief history of the island during the 11th to 14th centuries, exploring especially the complicated relationship between the rulers of Sicily and the Church. This was the period in Italian history when the center of gravitation shifted from the communes to the monarchy, and from northern to southern Italy. It was in 1060 that the Normans decided upon the conquest of Sicily. It was a lengthy process, made by a group of barons under the leadership of Robert of Guiscard, who eventually left his brother Roger as Count of Sicily and *de facto* ruler in charge of the island. After Guiscard’s death in 1085, Roger ruled Sicily under the suzerainty of the pope, who had granted the authority to conquer the island to the Normans and invested Guiscard as Duke of Apulia and Calabria. Roger II was the son of Count Roger of Sicily and was responsible for uniting the whole of southern Italy into the Kingdom of Sicily during the years 1127-1130. His son, William I, reigned from 1154 to 1166 and picked up the nickname “the Bad” because of his severity and the unpopularity of the men he put in power. His son, William II, however, had a much more tranquil
reign in which he who brought harmony to the diverse elements of Sicily, was a champion of the Church and encouraged trade and industry. The rule of the Norman kings is considered to this day the Golden Age of Sicily, because, for nearly a century, the island lived in peace and prosperity.

But this is where the Norman rule comes to an end and the rule of Sicily pivots toward the German Hohenstaufen line. This was all due to Constance, daughter of Roger II and aunt to William II, who inherited the kingdom upon William’s death. She had married Henry VI, son of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, at the age of 31 in 1186, four years before William’s death. Henry VI, who was 11 years Constance’s junior, was crowned King of Sicily, thanks to Constance’s inheritance, at Palermo on Christmas Day, 1194. However, Constance was not present at his coronation, because she was otherwise occupied giving birth to her son, Frederick II, in the small town of Jesi in the Marche. As she was 40 years old at the time and had not given birth to any other heirs, she wanted the birth to be as public as possible, so she gave birth to Frederick in a tent in the market square, on December 26. Henry VI died soon after from a sudden attack of dysentery, in Messina on September 28, 1197. Constance took control of the government, but her power was fragile, so she turned to Pope Innocent III for reinforcement. She died soon after her husband, in 1198, when Frederick was only 3. She had made a will in which she placed Frederick under the guardianship of Innocent III, unaware of how contentious the relationship between her son and the Church would become.

Frederick II of Hohenstaufen is one of the most controversial figures in medieval history. The legends and gossip about him abound: he conducted experiments on whether the soul survives death, he kept a harem in the style of a sultan, or, if you believe Pope
Gregory IX, he was the Antichrist. Historically, he spent his entire life in bitter conflict with the Pope. He was excommunicated four times, he threatened to revoke the Donation of Constantine and return the Church to its early poverty, and he carried out a Christian crusade in Jerusalem as an excommunicate of the Church, in which he made a peaceful negotiation with the sultan Al-Kamil to restore Jerusalem to the Christians by agreeing to let the city’s mosques remain Muslim. Indeed his relations with Muslims (he employed them in his army and welcomed Muslim scholars and scientists in his court) is one of the major reasons he had such a shady public image, especially in regards to his adherence to contemporary Christian orthodoxy. On the other hand, Frederick was an extremely powerful and charismatic ruler who united Sicily under a unique cultural and political heritage. They used to call him *stupor mundi*, or Wonder of the World. His court (the first to write in an Italian vernacular), his desire for knowledge (he wrote the *De Arte venandi cum avibus*, a famous book on falconry, and founded the University of Naples), and his effectiveness as a temporal political ruler (his epoch-making code of laws in the *Liber augustalis* restored order to the kingdom) were to be admired. It was under Frederick that the island recovered something of its former glory.

Frederick II had many children, both legitimate and illegitimate, but it is said that his favorite was his illegitimate son by Bianca Lancia: Manfred. When Frederick died in 1250, he left everything to his eldest legitimate son, Conrad IV, who became King of Germany, but until Conrad could descend to Italy and set up his own administration, Frederick left the 18-year-old Manfred as governor of all of Italy. He named him Prince

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253 “He himself is the great dragon who led astray the entire world; he is the Antichrist, whose forerunners he said we were; and he is another Balaam, hired for a price to curse us, the prince among the princes of darkness who misuse the Prophets.” (Jansen, Katherine et al. *Medieval Italy Texts in Translation.* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 287.)
of Taranto and put him into the line of succession for the Kingdom of Sicily. Conrad IV
died suddenly in 1254, leaving behind his son, Conradin, who was barely 3 years old.
Conradin was the rightful claimant to the crown of Naples and Sicily, but Manfred
assumed the regency in Conradin’s name. For this, Pope Alexander IV, who had been
named Conradin’s guardian, excommunicated Manfred in 1254 (Manfred would be
excommunicated once again in 1262 by Pope Urban IV). Four years later, upon rumors of
Conradin’s death, Manfred was crowned King of Sicily. It was at this point in time that
the Church realized how dangerous Manfred was; they recognized in him as able a foe as
his father had been, as he was equally charming and well loved by his loyal subjects.
Their objective was to prevent the rebirth of Hohenstaufen power, first by taking down
Manfred and then the young Conradin. It was also during this time that tensions were
mounting among the rival factions in Italy. Guelph versus Ghibelline was no longer a
question of Pope or Emperor but now seemed a question of Pope or Hohenstaufen. The
Pope knew he had to act to keep his sovereignty over Europe, so he called in Charles I of
Anjou, count of Provence, to crush his enemies and provide Italy with a more dutiful
government.\textsuperscript{254}

Charles advanced into Italy with a large force in 1265. He entered Rome and was
crowned King of Sicily by Pope Urban IV in 1266. He set out to take possession of his
kingdom, which led to the battle in which Manfred would lose his life: the Battle of
Benevento. Charles passed down the old Via Latina to the border of the kingdom at

\textsuperscript{254} Steven Runciman sums up the papal policy for the second half of the 13th century as such: “From the
time of Frederick’s death in 1250 to the coronation of Henry VII in 1311 there was no crowned Emperor in
the West. Partly by accident but still more by papal policy, the King of the Romans, the Emperor-elect, was
no more than King of Germany; and the extension of his power into Italy was, whenever it was possible,
hindered by the Popes’ deliberate actions.” (Runciman, Steven. \textit{The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the
280).
Ceprano on the River Liri. He found that the bridge across the river was undestroyed and deserted, which allowed for his easy entry with his large army.\textsuperscript{255} Manfred met Charles’ forces at Benevento but, abandoned by some of his barons during the battle, was defeated and killed on February 26, 1266, giving Charles of Anjou control of the kingdom. Charles had Manfred’s body buried without a religious ceremony (since he died an excommunicate), at the foot of the bridge of Benevento.\textsuperscript{256} Soldiers threw stones on Manfred’s body until a heavy cairn covered him. It is said that Pope Clement IV ordered the Archbishop of Cosenza to exhume the corpse and cast it, unburied, outside the bounds of papal territory.

After Manfred’s death, the Ghibelline cause in Italy was championed by the sole surviving legitimate representative of the Swabian line: Conradin. Ghibellines throughout Italy called upon the young man to enter Italy and assert his hereditary rights. Yet the Ghibelline hope was short-lived, as Conradin was defeated by Charles of Anjou at the Battle of Tagliacozzo, in the rugged Abruzzi region north of Naples, in 1268. Conradin escaped the battle and rode to Rome, but was forced to then set out across the Campania to the seaport of Astura, where he hoped to flee to Genoa. The local lord had him arrested, however, and he was soon moved to Naples to the Castel dell’Ovo. He was sentenced to decapitation by Charles of Anjou and publicly beheaded in the Piazza del Mercato in Naples on October 29, 1268. His trial and death shocked the conscience of Europe, who saw him as a young and innocent victim.

One would think that with Conradin’s death, Hohenstaufen power in Italy had finally been crushed and that Charles of Anjou would be free to rule Sicily without

\textsuperscript{255} Dante attributed this lack of defense to treachery.
\textsuperscript{256} See Villani, VII, 9.
opposition, but that was not the case. Earlier, in 1262, Manfred had married his daughter by Beatrice of Savoy, Constance, to Peter III of Aragon, elder son of Aragonese King James I. When Conradin was defeated in 1268, exiles from the Sicilian kingdom began flooding into Constance and Peter’s court in Barcelona. Constance became the heiress of the Ghibelline cause in Italy. Her husband was devoted to her and had given her the title of queen years before he ascended his father’s throne. The refugees from Sicily who arrived at her court included officials who had served her grandfather, Frederick II, such as Richard Filangieri, Henry of Isernia and, most importantly, the doctor John of Procida, who arrived sometime before 1274. Helen Wieruszowski has discussed how the atmosphere of the Aragonese court was heavily influenced by Italian culture, a singularity in Spain at that time. The sheer number of Italians at their court was a conspicuous clue as to the preparations the Aragonesi were making to become the future rulers of the Kingdom of Sicily. Chief among these Italians was John of Procida, who has been made a legend through numerous retellings of his story. The legend has it that he traveled around the courts of Europe winning adherents to the cause of Constance and Peter and that he is the one responsible for inciting the Sicilian Vespers of 1282. The legend will be discussed in more detail once we get into the contemporary chronicles of the time, because it is of extreme importance to understanding where Dante’s information about the Sicilian Vespers comes from, but as for the truth of things, it would seem John of Procida, while not necessarily organizing the Sicilian Vespers, played a large role in

258 In addition to the men from Frederick II’s court, there was the ex-empress Constance, sister of Manfred, Ruggero Loria, Conrad and Manfred Lancia with their sister Margherita, as well as many others.
provoking the resentment of the Sicilians, though perhaps mostly through sending various agents throughout Europe rather than visiting personally.

On March 30, 1282 the bells began to ring for the vespers in Palermo. Upon that signal, messengers ran through the city inciting men to rise up against their oppressors. The streets filled with angry citizens of Palermo crying out “Death to the French!” Every Frenchman they came across was indeed killed. Charles of Anjou had driven them to this rebellion, having neglected Sicily and ruled with an oppressive harshness. The Angevins never regained control there. Scholars are undecided on what part outside forces played in the organization of this rebellion. The official story put out by the house of Aragon is that Peter happened to be fighting the Moors nearby in Africa during the time of the Sicilian Vespers, and it was only after the fact that the Sicilians invited him to come to their rescue and be crowned king. The time lag that occurred between the Vespers and the arrival of the Aragonesi in Sicily would suggest that there is truth to that. Steven Runciman concludes the following: “… the Sicilians had been driven desperate by a sense of mixed oppression and neglect… Aragonese agents, organized by John of Procida, fanned their resentment, and with the help of Byzantine gold and Byzantine agents, organized it into a definite rebellion.” In the end, Runciman believes it was the determination of the Sicilian people that freed them from the hated rule of the Angevins.

The story of Frederick’s lineage does in fact continue past the Sicilian Vespers, and Dante makes mention of several of Constance and Peter’s sons in the *Comedy*.

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260 Runciman, 293.
However, this chapter deals with historical events that took place before the year 1300, the setting of the *Comedy*, as they were more likely to have been reported in a written source that Dante could have consulted when writing his *Comedy* at the turn of the 14th century. Since the events connected to Constance and Peter’s children continued to unfold past the time of the setting of the *Comedy*, Dante’s ability to read about them is less likely. He probably heard news about them that would have been circulating during his lifetime. For this reason, we will not discuss the heirs of the house of Aragon in this chapter.261

Now that we have established what is known by modern-day scholars of the complicated story of the Sicilian rulers of the 11th to 14th centuries, we will turn to the crux of this chapter, which is what Dante knew when he was writing his *Comedy* in the 14th century. Before moving forward to discuss the information contained in the *Comedy* in order to assess Dante’s possible sources, it is necessary to delineate a certain problem that arises when one sets out to do that work. It should have been somewhat apparent in the previous chapter that certain sources are quite simply not detailed enough to account for Dante’s information. Many were ruled out because of their brevity, and Giovanni Villani’s *Cronica* was held up as a standard upon which all of Dante’s information became even more fleshed out and detailed.

The chronicles from the previous chapter that are far too simplistic and concise in their descriptions of events can almost never account for Dante’s historical information, which is much more detailed. Works that fall into this category from the previous chapter include the anonymous chronicle contained in the XIII.F.16 manuscript in the Biblioteca

261 For Dante’s opinion of the major players and heirs who took over the fight between Peter III of Aragon and Charles I of Anjou, see *Purg.* 7.118-120, *Convivio* 4.6.20 and *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.12.5.
Nazionale di Napoli, the *Cronichetta* of the Magliab. XXV.505 at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Martin of Troppau’s *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum*, the *Gesta florentinorum* by Sanzanome, the *Gesta florentinorum* by an anonymous author and the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle. All of these works, because of the brevity of their information, were checked and ruled out as potential sources for Dante’s knowledge of the Sicilian dynasties.

The new characters in this chapter, due to their geographic setting being quite different than the characters who participated in the battles of Montaperti and Colle Val d’Elsa, necessitates that we explore historical sources hitherto unspoken of, especially chronicles from southern Italy. The sources discussed in the previous chapter were almost all Florentine or Sienese, not just in terms of the author’s *patria* but also in terms of the current locations of the surviving manuscripts. Obviously a source that was both written in Tuscany and that has been preserved in a Tuscan library had more of a chance of being read by Dante than one that perhaps never circulated outside of southern Italy. But since there is often no way to know whether the reason the only surviving copy of a manuscript is located in a library in southern Italy is because that work never made its way north at the time of its publication or because the only libraries who saw fit to preserve it were the ones from the town in which it originated, we will still consider all the southern chronicles as potential sources of the *Comedy*.

When canvassing the scene of history writing in the Kingdom of Sicily in the 12th and 13th centuries, what is immediately striking is the fact that Frederick II paid scant

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262 While the *Chronicon* is obviously an important historical source of Dante’s time because of its influence and its immense popularity, and because we know Villani and Brunetto Latini used it, it quite simply does not go into enough detail. It perhaps could have been used for background information, and Martin does talk about Robert Guiscard, Constance, Frederick II, Manfred and Conradin, but he gives very surface-level details about them. Since it ends in 1270, it is obviously missing information on the Sicilian Vespers.
attention to the historiography of his kingdom. His court preferred to focus on other forms of art and propaganda—epistles, official manifestos, orations (especially by Pier delle Vigne)—but there was no officially authorized chronicle of Frederick commissioned by the emperor himself. Even Riccardo da San Germano, who was a lay chronicler in a bureaucratic position in Frederick’s court, did not receive the OK from the emperor to write his *Cronaca*. Manfred, however, did commission an official chronicle from the so-called Nicholas of Jamsilla, who scholars believe was really Goffredo da Cosenza, a notary and secretary of Manfred’s. Unfortunately, the chronicle only covers the years 1210 to 1258, which misses all of the house of Hauteville (including the legend of Constance being a nun), the key battles of Benevento and Tagliacozzo, as well as the Sicilian Vespers. Thus, there was nothing the so-called Jamsilla chronicle could have offered to this investigation.

Another chronicle that covered the Norman house of Hauteville’s conquering of Sicily and subsequent reign there is Alessandro Telese’s *De Rebus Gestis*. Telese was a monk in the order of S. Benedetto writing in the middle of the 12th century, but he only covered the years 1127 to 1135, which was during the reign of Roger II, Constance’s father. Unfortunately, he post-dated Robert Guiscard and pre-dated William II and Constance. Dante does not include Roger II in his *Comedy*. The same can be said for the

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*Chronicon Beneventanum* by Falco of Benevento, a notary of the Church and judge of Benevento. Falco also misses the mark in terms of the years he covers—he instead covers the reign of William I “the Bad,” Roger II’s son and Constance’s brother. William I also does not appear in the *Comedy*. Other Norman chronicles whose timeline didn’t quite match up with what Dante would have needed to read are the *Chronicon* of Romuald Guarna, archbishop of Salerno, which covers the years 1121 to 1178 and Hugo Falcandus’ *Liber de Regno Sicilie*, which covers the troubled years after the death of Roger II in 1154 up to the minority of William II. The *Liber* was actually not written by anyone named Hugo Falcandus, as that was a name that occurred for the first time in the earliest printed edition in 1550, which probably resulted from a misreading of a damaged inscription. Grant Loud, who has been one of the most prolific scholars of Norman chroniclers, believes it was written relatively soon after the events described, and probably in the 1170s because it would not have had such a pessimistic tone if it were written later in William II’s reign, which was generally peaceful. While the chronicles of


267 Falco does briefly mention Robert Guiscard when Roger II comes to Salerno and gives the following speech: “Signori e fratelli, come be sa la vostra intelligenza questa città, che oggi è governata da voi con accortezza, diventò possesso di mio zio Roberto Guiscardo, duca di beata memoria, che la conquistò con coraggio e con grande accortezza…” (*Chronicon Beneventanum*, 87). This chronicle was originally written in Latin. Original Latin: “Domini, et fratres, sicut vestra novit sagacitas, Robertus Guiscardus Dux olim bonae memoriae Patruus meus, civitatem hanc, quam modo vestra tenet prudentia, acquisivit” (Benevento, “Cronica,” 193)


270 See *History of the Tyrants*, p. 30, for theories as to who wrote it.
Telese and Falco could be considered manifestos for King Roger II, Hugo Falcandus’ chronicle could be criticized for doing the exact opposite and attacking King William I as a cruel tyrant. But Loud points out that that criticism would ignore why history was written in the Middle Ages—it was always in service of a certain point of view. “All three historians were products of troubled and contentious times; it would be naïve, therefore, to expect fairness or neutrality from them.”

The difficulty in assessing the details of Dante’s knowledge of this particular chapter in history is that these were perhaps some of the most famous men in Italy at the time. Your average medieval Italian citizen was sure to have at least heard their names and had a general sense of who they were. What we must find in Dante are the peculiarities, the specifics, the idiosyncratic elements—that is, facts that were not necessarily common knowledge or whose validity was at least contested in some way.

We will begin with Frederick II, whose appearance in Inferno 10 is misleadingly simplistic and fleeting. Dante relegates Frederick to his name, merely mentioned in passing, rather than a fleshed-out character. Farinata says of him in Inferno 10, “qui con più di mille giaccio:/ qua dentro è ‘l secondo Federico e ‘l Cardinale;/ e de li altri mi taccio” (118-120). Though this is Frederick’s physical location within the Comedy, it is not the only reference Dante makes to him, either directly or indirectly. In Inferno 13, Frederick’s chancellor and secretary, Pier delle Vigne, makes a lengthy appearance in the Forest of the Suicides, where he speaks of his emperor: “Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi/ del cor di Federigo e che le volsi,/ serrando e diserrando, si soavi/ che dal secreto suo quasi ogn’uom tolsi” (58-69). Dante also makes numerous references to the art of

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falconry throughout *Purgatorio*, and Frederick’s *De Arte venandi cum avibus* was the foremost text on falconry during Dante’s time. Daniela Boccassini studied the connections between Dante’s falconry references and Frederick’s work. While she found no evidence of Dante’s direct citation of the text of the *De Arte venandi*, because Dante was spending his time among a Ghibelline milieu, he most likely learned about Frederick’s art of falconry because of the many falconers of Frederick who sought employment in northern Italy after he and Manfred’s deaths.

Dante makes a final reference to Frederick in *Purgatorio* 16 when he writes:

> In sul paese ch’Adice e Po riga,
> solea valore e cortesia trovarsi,
> prima che Federigo avesse briga;
> or può sicuramente indi passarsi
> per qualunque lasciassse, per vergogna
> di ragionar coi buoni o d’appressarsi. (115-120)

He also asks, “Le leggi son, ma chi pon mano ad esse?/ nullo” (97-98). “Avere briga” refers to the strife Frederick was met with from the papacy. According to Dante, the papacy took up the sword against him, which it should not have done. And now there is no one who applies the laws in Italy—evil men can pass through Lombardy with ease. This whole passage is linked to a belief Dante expresses in another of his works, the

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272 Boccassini, Daniela. “Falconry as a Transmutative Art: Dante, Frederick II, and Islam.” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, vol. 125, 2007, pp. 157-82. For example, Frederick’s *De Arte venandi* is the only work not written in Arabic that describes the technique of sealing or *cilitatio*, which Dante describes in *Purg. 13.67-72*. Boccassini sees the relationship between falcon and falconer as that of populace and sovereign, “controlling the aggressiveness of humankind by way of his ‘taming power’” (p.166). She argues that Dante condemned Frederick to Hell because he was blind to the sacred core of the art of falconry: its ability to tame one’s own instinctual pride, as ultimately God is the one true “tamer” of man. See also the story of Frederick beheading his prized falcon in the *Novellino*. Frederick put the falcon to death because it killed a young eagle, and the “eagle” was its Lord.
Convivio, where he states that Italy has had no imperial guidance since the death of Frederick II in 1250. “Federigo di Soave,ultimo imperadore de li Romani—ultimo dico per rispetto al tempo presente” (Conv. 4.3.6).

Perhaps none of these facts would seem particularly peculiar enough to pinpoint them in one specific source. That Frederick had a contentious relationship with the Church is something that surely everyone would have known. The fact that he was the last emperor to rule and that since him Italy had been lawless was also common knowledge. Frederick was excommunicated many times over by the Pope, so one might also suppose that it is no surprise that Dante would place him in the Cemetery of the Epicureans in Hell, or that Dante would draw the conclusion that an infamous heretic believed “che l’anima col corpo morta fanno” (Inf. 10.15). But this was actually not as common a contemporary presentation of Frederick as most Dante commentators would have you believe. In fact, it is one of the only facts about Frederick that we find in the Comedy that is a singularity among chronicles of the time.  

One of the most promising potential sources for Dante’s depiction of Frederick is Riccardo da San Germano’s Cronaca, as it was the one chronicle written during Frederick’s reign. It covers the years from the death of William II (1189) up to 1243, seven years before Frederick died, making Riccardo our prime witness to Frederick’s life. His chronicle is often noted for its objectivity and impartiality, its matter-of-fact delivery of the events and its accurate analysis of the Swabian monarchy; in direct contrast to

273 Villani does present Frederick as an Epicurean, but as we have discussed in the previous chapter, the likelihood that any version of Villani’s Nuova Cronica was circulating before Dante wrote the Comedy is incredibly low. See the following excerpt from VI, I of Villani: “Questo Federigo… fu uomo di grande affare e di gran valore, savio di scrittura e di senno naturale, universale in tutte cose… E fu dissoluto in lussuria in più guise de’ Saracini: in tutt’i diletti corporali volle abbandonare, e quasi vita epicuria tenne, non faccendo conto che mai fosse altra vita; e questa fu l’ una principale cagione perché venne nemico de’ cherici e di santa Chiesa.”
Nicholas Jamsilla’s very partisan account of Manfred’s reign. But Giuseppe Sperduti, the editor of the latest edition of the chronicle, thinks scholars have previously exalted Riccardo too much. He thinks at most Riccardo’s chronicle is missing color or flourish, but it can’t be objective when it’s only presenting Frederick’s side of things and constantly defending him from the accusations of the Church. Unfortunately, Riccardo’s chronicle is not a viable source for Dante. While he mentions Frederick’s excommunications, he says nothing of his Epicurean lifestyle.

The next source that was considered as Dante’s source of information for his depiction of Frederick was Brunetto Latini’s Tresor, especially because of Latini’s staunch Guelph political beliefs. The Tresor was discussed in the previous chapter as a potential source for Dante’s knowledge of Montaperti but was ruled out due to its lack of detail. However, the Tresor is far more exhaustive in its treatment of the house of Hohenstaufen. In fact, Latini finishes his section devoted to history with the end of the Hohenstaufen line at the Battle of Tagliacozzo in 1268. We know that Villani derived much of his history of the Hohenstaufens from Latini, drawing on Latini’s Guelph tale of two historical villains, Frederick and Manfred, who contributed to their own destruction through their heinous sins.

We also know that Villani then turned to some version of the chronicle Lu Rebellamentu di Sichilia for his extremely detailed account of the Sicilian Vespers. We will discuss the Rebellamentu at length when we get to Dante’s presentation of the Sicilian Vespers, but for now it’s important to know that Latini’s Tresor and the

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275 da San Germano, La Cronaca, 7.
Rebellamentu are linked due to one manuscript, the VIII Latini 1375 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, which interpolates the legend of John of Procida where Latini leaves off his history (the manuscript is just a fragment of a vernacularization of the Tresor, beginning in the middle of Book II, chapter 6). Michele Amari is the scholar responsible for bringing the VIII Latini 1375 to light at the end of the 19th century. He dates the manuscript to the 14th century but does not say how early, so it is unclear if it could have been circulating before Dante’s writing of the Comedy. Comparing this manuscript fragment to modern editions of Latini’s Tresor proved extremely difficult, mostly in part to there being no single authoritative edition of Latini’s work. This has to do with the extremely muddled editing and translation history of the Tresor (Latini himself wrote two different authorial redactions). The numbering of the chapters, and the content of the chapters themselves, vary from edition to edition even today. Resolving that complex problem is outside the scope of this thesis. Because the Italian textual history of the Tresor is so hopelessly complicated by a wide variety of manifestations of later medieval Florentine history, I simply used the 2003 English translation of the original French.\textsuperscript{276} The Tresor is one of the few historical texts Dante cites and names directly in the Comedy, but there is no way of telling which redaction he was familiar with.\textsuperscript{277}

Latini’s first words in the Tesoro about Frederick II are in fact overall positive, “This Frederick had a heart greater than all other men’s, and he was marvelously wise


\textsuperscript{277} \textit{Inf.} 15.119.
and articulate, and he was very learned and knew all languages,\textsuperscript{278} even if the rest of the work denigrates Frederick for his obstinacy toward the Church. Latini doesn’t shy away from reporting some of Frederick’s most heinous crimes, including his treatment of his own son Henry, who he had put to death, but he never outright accuses him of being an Epicurean. The closest he comes is when he says Frederick derived pleasure in “all terrestrial delights.”\textsuperscript{279}

As for the VIII Latini 1375 manuscript’s presentation of Frederick, we get a complete undoing of Latini’s presentation. Despite the VIII Latini 1375 going under the name of the \textit{Tesoro} of Brunetto Latini, the text diverges greatly from the modern translation of the original French that we just looked at, with far more additions than just the interpolation of the \textit{Rebellamentu}. Not only are additions made, but the history of the Hohenstaufens as a whole is edited to reflect the opinions of the compiler, who Amari suspects was a Tuscan living in exile in Sicily during the time of Boniface VIII, a Ghibelline partisan who was a staunch defender of the house of Hohenstaufen.\textsuperscript{280} Amari believes that the compiler was taking from some tradition expounded by the makers of the house of Swabia in Italy and particularly in southern Italy “per cagion di tutti que’ minuti particolari su Federigo, su Manfred, su Corrado, sul Napoli, su i baroni del regno presi a Benevento.”\textsuperscript{281} The compiler even adds his own chapter with the title of “Come la chiesa vacanti di buoni pastori tradiva lo ‘nperadore.” Clearly we have a point of view expounded in this compilation that was entirely opposite of Latini’s, i.e. one that was not

\textsuperscript{278} \textit{Li Livres Dou Tresor}, 54.  
\textsuperscript{279} Ibid, 57. Specifically, his love of hunting.  
\textsuperscript{280} Amari believes it might have even been a descendant of Farinata degli Uberti, because there’s a special mention of a Pierasino degli Uberti (Amari, Michele. \textit{Altre Narrazioni Del Vespro Siciliano, Scritte Nel Buon Secolo Delle Lingua E Pubblicate Da Michele Amari.} Milan, Ulrico Hoepli, 1887, p. 1).  
\textsuperscript{281} Ibid, xliii.
sympathetic at all toward the Church. Thus Latini’s presentation of Frederick as a wise and articulate man who spoke many languages is expanded by the compiler: Now he speaks *nine* languages, he’s a master of science and philosophy and he is skilled in the art of war.  

He adds that Frederick “fue di bella conpressione: la faccia sua grande, colorita, ed occhi serpentine e capellatura bionda e tutto bene fatto d’ogni membra…”

That is just one example of how the compiler flips the presentation of the Swabian dynasty from Latini’s original, very Guelph account of their lives, but, as we will see when we get to the other characters in this chapter, there are several others.

I’d now like to take a look at two sources that I believe are the closest we will come to fully accounting for Dante’s knowledge of the Sicilian dynasties, but especially of Frederick. We’ll begin with Saba Malaspina’s *Liber gestorum regum Sicilie* before considering Salimbene de Adam’s *Cronica*. Malaspina was born in Rome and served as a deacon in Calabria and Sicily under Alexander IV and Martin IV. As a writer for the papal curia, he shows his Guelph spirit throughout the *Liber*, defending the Roman curia and the Angevin dynasty. He composed 10 books for his chronicle between 1284 and 1285, which can be divided into two parts: the first half covering the kingdom of Sicily from Frederick II’s death in 1250 until 1276, the second half covering up to the year 1285, the year of Charles of Anjou’s death. The fact that he sat down to write everything at once after the principal facts of the story had unfolded makes Malaspina’s work closer to a history as we know it than a chronicle, especially since the author shows no interest

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283 Ibid.

in presenting a precise chronology (dates are rarely mentioned). The Liber is filled with
details, as Malaspina has a very narrative style of recounting events. Though perhaps not
widely circulated, the Liber had a good chance of being circulated throughout Italy, as
there are seven known surviving manuscripts. The 1999 edition used for this thesis was
based on Vat. Lat. 3972 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, containing the whole
book, the Lat. 5696 at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, containing the first half of the
work, and the HM 1034 at the Huntington Library in California, containing the second
half of the work. All are 14th century.

Malaspina’s description of Frederick aligns well with Dante’s. While he does not
call Frederick an Epicurean, he does say that Frederick was beyond saving, such were the
depth of his abominable depravity.\textsuperscript{285} Malaspina also ties Frederick to his love of the
occult. He says that Frederick tried to avoid death, but death at one point catches every
creature on earth, and even the inimitable Frederick could not avoid it. Malaspina says
that he surely tried, and that perhaps that was where his interest in the occult arts came
from, which we learn from the following passage:

\begin{quote}
\ldots con sottile ricerca indagava i segreti della natura, onorava a tal punto gli
astrologi, gli stregoni e gli aruspici, che, in base ai loro presagi ed auspici,
l’agilissimo pensiero di Federico vagava di continuo con rapido movimento come
il vento.\textsuperscript{286}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{285} Malaspina, 15-17.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid, 16-17. Original Latin: “sicque dum subtili indagatione naturalia vestigabat, astrologos et
nigromanticos adeo venerabatur et aurispices, quod eorum divinationibus et auspiciis Frederici velocissima
cogitation ad similitudinem venti motu celery denuo vagabatur” (ibid, 14).
This passage calls to mind the implicit association of Frederick with the three men in the 
*bolgia* of the diviners—Michael Scot, Guido Bonatti and Asdente, who we will discuss shortly and who all made prophecies about Frederick.

The second chronicle I believe was one of Dante’s definite historical sources is Salimbene de Adam’s *Cronica*. Salimbene lived from 1221 to 1290, and, as a friar of the Franciscan order, traveled extensively in Italy and France, met many important people and was an eyewitness to many interesting events. He wrote his *Cronica* between 1283 and 1288, and it covers the years 1167-1287. He wrote it for his niece, Agnes, a nun who wished to know about her ancestors. The first printed edition of Salimbene did not appear until 1847, but it was error-ridden and difficult to use. The subsequent edition by O. Holder-Egger, which appears in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in 1913, was a much-improved edition and still considered to be the best critical edition we have. The Cod. Vat. 7260 in the Vatican Library is considered to be autograph, though it’s missing about 200 folios. Salimbene’s chronicle is considered one of the richest sources of information about medieval life to have come down to us. Perhaps due to the late “discovery” of the text by scholars or because there was no translation done of the work in its entirety until Joseph Baird translated it into English in 1986, few people have studied the connections between Salimbene’s *Cronica* and Dante’s *Comedy*. However, Salimbene’s chronicle is the only text among those we will analyze that covers almost every single character pertinent to this chapter: Robert Guiscard, William II, Constance, Frederick, Michael Scot, Pier delle Vigne, Asdente, Manfred, Conradian, Constanza II and Peter of Aragon.

We will discuss in this chapter just how interconnected the two texts are, beginning with

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287 The city of Parma commissioned the edition, under the title *Chronica Fratris Salimbene Ordinis Minorum ex codice Bibliothecae Vaticanae nunc primum edita*.
288 The only character left out is Guido Bonatti.
Salimbene’s depiction of Frederick.\textsuperscript{289} Although its contents make it a surefire source for Dante, it is unclear what the \textit{Cronica’s} circulation was. No copy of the \textit{Cronica} has ever been found apart from the original, holograph manuscript, the Cod. Vaticano 7260.

Salimbene’s characterization of Frederick fits perfectly with Dante’s.\textsuperscript{290} Dante need no further instruction as to where in Hell to place Frederick than to read Salimbene’s subheading, “The Emperor Frederick was an Epicurean.” As just mentioned above, it is commonplace to read that Frederick’s Epicureanism was widely spoken about in the Middle Ages,\textsuperscript{291} but aside from Salimbene’s chronicle, none of the historical works considered in this chapter use the word “Epicurean” or even talk about Frederick’s belief that the soul died with the body. At most, they report his excommunications, his conflict with the Church and his interest in the occult arts. There is always just a tinge of Epicureanism associated with him—but nothing ever so blunt as what Salimbene writes. Salimbene does not just claim that Frederick was an Epicurean; he gives examples. He tells of Frederick’s experiments on humans—how he forced infants to grow up in an environment with no language to see if they would ever learn to speak, how he fed two men a big meal, sent one to sleep and the other to hunt and then disemboweled them to see which one had digested better, how he sealed a man up in a cask and watched him

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289 Several times throughout the \textit{Cronica}, Salimbene refers to other works he had written that are now lost. Those include his first historical work, which he said began with the words “Octavianus Caesar Augustus,” a “prologue” in which he outlined his philosophy of history and his \textit{Tractatus pape Gregorii X} that he wrote in 1266. Whether Dante had read any of these works will never be known.
290 Even Salimbene’s presentation of Frederick’s good qualities could account for the positive image Dante paints of the emperor in the \textit{De Vulgari Eloquentia}. See the following passage from the \textit{Cronica}: “At times, however, Frederick was a worthy man, and when he wished to show his good, courtly side, he could be witty, charming, urbane, and industrious. He was adept at writing and singing, and was well-versed in the art of writing lyrics and songs. He was a handsome, well-formed man of medium height.” (\textit{The Chronicle of Salimbene}, 350).
291 See LaFavia, Louis. “Per una reinterpretazione dell’episodio di Manfredi.” \textit{Dante Studies}, vol. 91, 1973, pp. 81-100 (see p. 89). He writes that Frederick II’s materialism “è riportato da tutti i cronisti” and that Dante’s placement of him in Hell just follows “l’opinione generale” of the time.
die, to see if his soul escaped in the moment of death or if it died with the body.\textsuperscript{292} Salimbene then quotes from Scripture to prove that there is life after death and says that the passages contradict Frederick’s belief, for he and his men “held that there is no other life than the present one, and they believed this only in order to give themselves up the more freely to their fleshly and wretched acts.”\textsuperscript{293} Salimbene then goes on to say that Frederick had many “idiosyncrasies: idle curiosity, lack of faith, perversity, tyranny, and accursedness,” some of which he had written about in another chronicle on the 12 evils of Frederick—one of his lost texts. Who knows how much more information Dante possessed about Frederick’s Epicureanism, if he had in fact read that text as well, but what Salimbene includes in his \textit{Cronica} is enough to convince Dante to condemn Frederick for all eternity to the Cemetery of the Epicureans.\textsuperscript{294}

Next, we will look at the men from Frederick’s court who appear in the \textit{Comedy}, as their very presence tells us that Dante knew that they were in Frederick’s service. Before we unpack the complex episode with Pier delle Vigne, we will turn to \textit{Inferno} 20, where we meet three souls who seem perhaps to be placed together precisely because of their connection to Frederick. In \textit{Inferno} 20 we meet Michael Scot, Guido Bonatti and Asdente, who are located in the fourth \textit{bolgia} of the diviners, where souls’ heads are twisted around to the back of their bodies, and they are forced to walk backwards as punishment for always trying to see forward into the future. Both Scot and Bonatti were at one time advisors to the emperor; both of them were also great scholars—Bonatti

\textsuperscript{292} \textit{The Chronicle of Salimbene}, 352-355.
\textsuperscript{293} Ibid, 354.
\textsuperscript{294} Right at the start of Salimbene’s \textit{Cronica}, he gives this damning characterization of Frederick: “For this Frederick was an evil and accursed man, a schismatic, an heretic, and an Epicurean, who defiled the whole earth, because he sowed the seeds of division and discord in the cities of Italy, which has lasted up until the present time.” (p. 5)
wrote a book of astronomy, while Scot was the author of numerous treatises and translations from Greek and Arabic. Asdente was not in Frederick’s service but is still connected to the emperor because he foretold the defeat of Frederick at the siege of Parma in 1248. Dante says nothing about Bonatti besides him being there, and all he says of Michael Scot is that he truly knew the game of magical frauds, or “magiche frode” (117). Dante seems to know a bit more about Asdente, aside obviously from the fact that Asdente, or “Toothless,” was his nickname. Dante says Asdente wishes he had attended to his leather and thread but instead repented too late (119-120), which indicates that Dante knew he was a cobbler. If we look outside the *Comedy* at Dante’s *Convivio* (also a testament to Dante’s knowledge of Frederick and Manfred, which we will see shortly), we see that he knew even more:

> Bene sono alquanti folli che credono che per questo vocabulo ‘nobile’ s’intenda ‘essere da molti nominato e conosciuto’, e dicono che viene da uno verbo che sta per conoscere, cioè ‘nosco’. E questo è falsissimo; ché, se ciò fosse, quali cose più fossero nomate e conosciute in loro genere, più sarebbero in loro genere nobili: e *Asdente, lo calzolaio da Parma, sarebbe più nobile che alcuno suo cittadino*” (4.16.16).

With this statement Dante adds that he knew Asdente was from Parma and was perhaps more famous than any other Parmese. So to sum, of Asdente Dante knows his nickname, his profession, where he was from, that he was a soothsayer and perhaps his prophesy about Frederick. Because he places them together, Dante also probably knew that both Michael Scot and Guido Bonatti had served as astrologers in Frederick’s court at Palermo and that they were both involved in occult sciences. There is a story that Villani and

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295 Italics my own.
others report about how it was prophesied that Frederick II would die in Florence (Firenze) whereas he actually died in Castelfiorentino (Firenzuola), in Apulia. But Dante does not allude to knowing that piece of information in any way.

Because there is no evidence in any of Dante’s writings that he read any of the works by Guido Bonatti or Michael Scot (and Asdente didn’t produce any), Dante could only have learned about them through some other source, such as chronicles and annals. Reading their names and that they were somehow involved with magic or astrology and their association to Frederick II would be enough to account for Dante’s knowledge of Scot and Bonatti. It is interesting to note a potential literary parallel in a story contained in the Novellino in which three sorcerers—though necromancers, not soothsayers—come to Frederick’s court and perform their versions of magical frauds.296 Frederick is described in that short story as giving his approval to anyone who had a special skill.

Dante’s knowledge of Asdente, however, requires a more detailed description, and he finds it easily in Salimbene’s Cronica. Salimbene is our only surviving source to talk about Asdente, and is surely where Dante got his information. All of Dante’s information about Asdente—his nickname, that we was a cobbler and a soothsayer, that he was the most famous man from Parma—can be found in Salimbene’s section of the Cronica “The Parmese prophet named Asdente.” Salimbene writes:

Also, at this time there was living in the city of Parma, a certain poor man, a shoemaker, who made sandals… and although he was unlearned, he had an inspired mind, because he could understand the writing of those who predicted the future, like Abbot Joachim… and Michael Scot, Frederick II’s astrologer.297

297 The Chronicle of Salimbene, 522.
Salimbene confirms the veracity of Asdente’s prophecies by saying he personally saw many of his predictions come true. He also explains that this man, whose real name was Benvenuto, was called Asdente because he had “large, misshapen teeth.” Salimbene describes some of the future events Asdente predicted and concludes his section on the prophet by declaring how famous he was, saying, “People came from all parts of the world to ask him questions.” As Salimbene was from Parma himself, he was perhaps best suited to attest to this soothsayer’s fame.

As for Michael Scot, there are several sources Dante could have pulled his information from. Though the astrologer does not appear in Latini’s original Tresor, the compiler of the VIII Latini 1375 version of the Tesoro includes information in his chronicle that would fully account for Dante’s knowledge in the Comedy. The compiler relates the story about how Frederick died in Firenzuola “siccome gli avea detto maestro Michele Iscotto di Scozia, lo quale fue lo migliore istrolago che fosse, d’Aristotile a quello giorno, in istrolomia: e fue maestro di Federigo…” Malaspina also reports the prophesy that Frederick would die under “fiorentini,” causing him to avoid Florence and flowers his entire life, but he does not attribute said prophesy to Michael Scot. Lastly, Michael Scot makes a rather lengthy appearance in Salimbene’s Cronica under the section heading of “Michael Scot, who was a good astrologer.” Salimbene reports a story about how Frederick made Michael Scot calculate how far his palace was from Heaven, then had the foundation lowered and asked him again to see if he’d perceive the change, and he did. That’s how Frederick knew he was a true astrologer. In addition,

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298 Ibid, 523.
299 Ibid, 541. This page contains the list of Asdente’s prophecies.
300 Due Cronache del Vespro, 97-98.
301 The Chronicle of Salimbene, 355-356.
Salimbene lists every prophecy Michael Scot ever made. He claims that everyone could see how true his prophecies were and he himself saw some of them fulfilled.

Now we will move on to the Pier delle Vigne episode of Inferno 13 in which a wealth of Dante’s knowledge is revealed. It is important to note that Dante gives enough details about Pier delle Vigne’s life that he does not feel the need to name him. Readers are supposed to put all of the information together to draw their conclusion as to whom Dante is speaking to. Pier delle Vigne (1190-1249) was born into a modest family in Capua. After studying law at Bologna, he quickly made his way up in the imperial court, becoming a notary in the imperial chancery in 1231 and then the principal author of the Liber augustalis (or Constitutions of Melfi) in 1234. In 1246, Frederick appointed him protonotary (in charge of government publications) and logotheta (official spokesman of the Empire). He was a well-known Latin prose stylist who was known for his stilus altus, and his collection of letters, the summae, circulated widely among intellectuals of Dante’s time. Brunetto Latini cited him for his exemplary rhetorical skill in his treatise on rhetoric. Strangely, though, Latini does not mention Pier delle Vigne in his Tresor. But Latini imitated delle Vigne’s style during his time in the Florentine chancery, as did Dante in his letters from exile. Dante is obviously also able to imitate delle Vigne’s style when he has him speak his own historical language in the Comedy. Delle Vigne was

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302 Ibid, 363.
303 In the VIII Latini 1375 version of the Tesoro, delle Vigne is named but is only described as Frederick’s “barone, legistro, cavaliere” (Due Cronache del Vespro, 99), but nothing is mentioned of his death.
304 “The influence of the Sicilian rhetoric on Dante was indeed tremendous. It is most conspicuous in his Latin letters where almost every sentence and the tone of the whole betrays the Sicilian models.” Wieruszowski, Helen. Politics and Culture in Medieval Spain and Italy. Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971, p. 435. See also Mazzamuto, Pietro. “L’epistolario di Pier Della Vigna e l’opera di Dante.” Atti del Convegno di studi su Dante e la Magna Curia, 1967, pp. 201-225. Mazzamuto believes it is probable Dante knew some version of Pier delle Vigne’s summae and used it for rhetorical instruction. Though not all of the letters circulating back then were actually written by delle Vigne, Mazzamuto lists which ones he thinks are authentic on p. 203. See p. 207 for all of the examples of Vignean style that Mazzamuto finds in Dante’s Latin letters, including alliteration and variation of word stems.
at the height of power as Frederick’s most intimate advisor when, just as quickly as he
had risen, he suddenly fell from grace. In 1249 he was arrested at Cremona, thrown in
prison and blinded. The reason for his imprisonment is still to this day unknown. Ernest
Kantorowicz, one of Frederick II’s greatest biographers, has suggested that delle Vigne
may have been guilty of bribery or embezzlement.\textsuperscript{305} Dante clearly did not know that, as
he has delle Vigne himself say that he was the victim of false rumors created by those
envious of his influence with the emperor.

The one document of Pier delle Vigne’s epistolary collection that scholars are
convined Dante had read is the \textit{Eulogy} he wrote for Frederick, which is replete with both
classical notions of divinity and Biblical allusions. In it, delle Vigne refers to Frederick as
both Caesar and Augustus, which Dante also has him do in \textit{Inferno} 13. Also, the last
word of the \textit{Eulogy} is \textit{inflammet}, while Dante has delle Vigne say that his downfall was
casted by Envy, who “\textit{infiammò contra me li animi tutti; e li ‘infiammati infiammar si
 Augusto}” (\textit{Inf.} 13.67-68).\textsuperscript{306} It is possible the \textit{Eulogy} was so well known that Dante
expected his readers to recall the document when reading his canto. William A. Stephany
maintains that one of the reasons for Dante’s condemnation of delle Vigne in the \textit{Comedy}
can be precisely located within the \textit{Eulogy}.\textsuperscript{307} He thinks that while Dante admired delle
Vigne’s style, he probably found the content outrageous and blasphemous. Delle Vigne’s
revival of pagan emperor worship, his lighthearted manipulation of Scripture and his
reference to Frederick as a new Messiah are all things that Stephany believes Dante

\textsuperscript{306} Italics my own. See the last line of the \textit{Eulogy} here: “\textit{Vivat igitur, vivat sancti Friderici nomen in
 populo, succrescat in ipsum fervor devotionis a subditis, et fidei meritum mater ipsa fidelitas in exemplum
 subjectionis inflammet}.”
would have found problematic. Keep in mind, though, that Dante himself later employed Scripture to praise Emperor Henry VII. In *Epistle* 5, written in 1310 as Henry VII was entering Italy, Dante described Henry as not only a new Messiah (“Leo fortis de tribu Iuda”) but a new Moses, leading his people to the land of milk and honey (“ad terram lacte ac melle manantem perducens”).

But what facts does Dante tell us he knew about delle Vigne’s life? It happens frequently that when Dante describes a character in the *Comedy* who had been an author, whose works Dante had read, he is able to paint a much fuller portrait of that person, to flesh them out with more color and detail. Such is the case with delle Vigne, whose epistolary collection we cannot neglect as being the primary source that provided Dante his material for his depiction of the imperial chancellor. From his epistles alone Dante could have been inspired to paint delle Vigne as someone who was extremely close to the emperor, perhaps to the point that he excluded others from Frederick’s intimacy, his “holding the keys to Frederick’s heart” making others in Frederick’s court extremely jealous, conceivably resulting in sabotage.

However, Dante could have also learned all of those details in Salimbene’s *Cronica*. Salimbene relates that Pier delle Vigne was not just a successful bureaucrat in Frederick’s service, but shared an intimate friendship with the emperor. Salimbene does not make the analogy of delle Vigne being the Peter to Frederick’s Jesus, but does say that the emperor loved him dearly and that he made him out of a poor man into his

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308 In *Epistle* 7, Dante describes the only known encounter between him and Henry VII. He says that when he saw Henry, he fell to his knees, touching Henry’s feet and kissing the ground before him. He then heard these words within himself, “Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi” (“Behold the Lamb of God, behold the one who carries away the sins of the world” [*Epistle* 7.10]).
secretary, raising him from the dust, giving him the title *logotheta*. Salimbene also relates how Frederick turned on his most trusted associate, apparently due to accusations of slander. Salimbene gives the specific account that Frederick had sent Pier delle Vigne and some others to Pope Innocent IV to prevent Frederick’s deposition and commanded that they not speak with the Pope alone without the others being present, but delle Vigne spoke with the Pope alone many times during the trip.

One historical detail about Pier delle Vigne that cannot be located in any of the chronicles considered is his death by suicide. Something almost every modern commentator reports is that Pier delle Vigne killed himself while in prison by dashing his head against a stone wall. Where they are pulling that information from is unclear, as the only source prior to Dante that mentions that delle Vigne committed suicide are the *Annales placentini Gibellini*, but not even they specify the manner in which he did it. Dante also never specifies the manner in which delle Vigne pulled off his suicide, or that he was blinded for that matter, but he does seem to know that he was imprisoned. While Salimbene does not say that delle Vigne killed himself, he does say that for his treachery, the emperor “had him imprisoned, and caused him to die a wretched death” but nothing about how he died. Did Dante learn that he died via suicide simply by popular rumor? Unfortunately, that is one mystery that this chapter will not be able to resolve, for now.

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310 *M.G.H., Scriptores*, XVIII, 1866, p. 498: “… quitavit Cremonam, ubi capi fecit Petrum de Vinea eius proditorem… In proximo Marci imperator dimisso rege Encio in Lombardia cum sua milicia ad partes Pontremulis ad civitatem Pisis accessit, duxitque secum Petrum de Vinea cui oculos de capite erruere fecit in Sancto Minato, ubi suam vitam finivit; quod castrum tunc habuit.” Italics my own.
312 Riccardo da San Germano’s *Cronaca* names Pier delle Vigne in his official duties on several occasions, but since he stopped writing before Pier’s death, he has nothing to report there. Thomas Tuscus specifically identifies him as Frederick’s *logotheta*, though Tuscus doesn’t report anything about his betrayal and subsequent imprisonment.
We will now turn back in time to Frederick’s predecessors, the Norman house of Hauteville, beginning with Robert Guiscard. Dante meets Guiscard in the Heaven of Mars among the warrior heroes of the faith. From what we glean about Robert Guiscard in *Paradiso* 18, Dante probably knew as much about him as he did Michael Scot and Guido Bonatti—i.e. his name, a general idea of when he lived and what his profession was. The only telling extra detail about Guiscard is Dante’s association of him with epic poetry. Every character listed with Guiscard in *Paradiso* 18 was a protagonist of an epic poem—Joshua, Judas, Maccabeus, Charlemagne, Roland, William of Orange, Renouard and Godfrey of Bouillon. Dante says of these spirits, “spiriti son beati, che giù prima/ che venissero al ciel, fuor di gran voce,/ si ch’ogie musa ne sarebbe oprima” (31-33). Thus, Dante knew Robert Guiscard’s name, that he had been a Christian hero in battle and that someone had written a poem about him—i.e. he had “inspired the muses.” Dante’s grouping of Guiscard with other men who had fought wars against Muslims suggests that perhaps Dante knew that fact as well.

One of the earliest chronicles written about the Normans is Guglielmo da Puglia’s *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, written between 1090 and 1111. This is one source that I believe bears consideration as something Dante may have been aware of, even if he never in fact read the text. It is a poem written in Latin hexameters probably by someone in Robert Guiscard’s court, perhaps even commissioned by him. The reason I suggest Dante was familiar with this work is because it is the only work of poetry about Guiscard that

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313 Par. 18.48.
314 Dante mentions Guiscard again in *Inferno* 28, when he talks about all the wars of Apulia. He writes, “con quella che sentio di colpi doglie/ per contastare a Ruberto Guiscard,” (13-14). All this really adds is that Guiscard was met with resistance when he went to war.
survives and was well known in its time. The only particular Dante possesses about Robert Guiscard is that he had inspired an epic poem.\textsuperscript{316} Aside from being familiar with the \textit{Gesta Roberti Wiscardi}, Dante could have learned all he needed to know about Robert Guiscard from Salimbene’s \textit{Cronica}. In fact, the section heading “Robert Guiscard, who, as a faithful warrior to the Church, earned the kingdom of Sicily, Calabria, Apulia, and Terra di Lavoro”\textsuperscript{317} is enough to account for all of Dante’s knowledge of Guiscard.

The next ancestor of Frederick’s gets a bit more space devoted to him: William II of Sicily. We find William in the Heaven of Jupiter among the just rulers in the eye of the Eagle. He receives two terzinas, yet we learn very little about him. Dante writes the following:

\begin{quote}
E quel che vedi ne l’arco declivo
Guglielmo fu, cui quella terra plora
che piagne Carlo e Federigo vivo:
ora concosce come s’innamora
lo Ciel del giusto rege e al sembianti
del suo fulgore il fa vedere ancora. (\textit{Par.} 20.61-66)
\end{quote}

From this we can glean that the Sicilian people considered William a good ruler, which would perhaps imply that Dante knew his nickname of “the Good.” William is the sole near-contemporary to Dante in this part of Heaven. The names of Frederick II of Aragon

\textsuperscript{316} The poem is rather lengthy, so I’ve only included here the opening prologue: “Gesta ducum veterum veteres cecinere poetae;/ Aggrediar vates novus edere gesta novorum:/ dicere fert animus, quo gens Normannica ductu/ Venerit Italian, fuerit quae causa morandi,/ Quosve secuta duces Latii sit adepta triumphum;/ Parce tuo vati pro viribus alta canenti,/ Clara, Rogere, ducis Roberti dignaque proles,/ Imperio cuius parere parata voluntas/ Me facit audacem: quia vires quas labor artis/ Ingeniumque negat, devotione pura ministrat;/ Et patris Urbani reverenda petitio, segnem/ Esse vetat; quia plus timeo peccare negando;/ Tanti pontificis quam iussa benigna sequendo.” (“Gesta Roberti Wiscardi,” 241).

\textsuperscript{317} \textit{The Chronicle of Salimbene}, 357.
and Charles II of Anjou are linked to William—but not necessarily because Dante traced William’s heritage down to the Aragonesi crown (Frederick II of Aragon was Emperor Frederick II’s great-grandson), but rather because those were the present rulers of southern Italy during the setting of the *Comedy*.

Riccardo da San Germano’s *Cronaca* was considered as one of Dante’s possible sources for information on William. While the author does paint a very rosy picture of the deceased William II, he includes no particulars that were picked up on in the *Comedy*. We will discuss Dante’s sources for William further in the following section on Constance, Frederick’s mother and Queen of Sicily.

Dante encounters Constance in the Heaven of the Moon, the companion of the very memorable Piccarda Donati. Piccarda and Constance are two women who broke their vows as nuns, both allegedly against their will. Piccarda indicates that Constance holds a higher place within the sphere of the moon or rather that she outshines all the other souls there when she says that Constance “s’accende/ di tutto il lume de la spera nostra,” (*Par.* 110-111). Though this is the physical space Constance occupies in the *Comedy*, it is not the first time we learn of her. Her name is first spoken by her grandson Manfred in *Purgatorio* 3, because he’s proud to come from her lineage and wants Dante to be impressed by his relation to a “beata” up in Heaven. Piccarda, however, does not link Constance to Manfred but rather to her husband, Henry VI, and her son, Frederick II. “Quest’è la luce de la gran Costanza/ che del secondo vento di Soave/ generò ‘l terzo e l’ultima possanza” (*Par.* 118-120). The second wind of Swabia was Henry VI, while

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318 He writes “Nel tempo, in cui quel re cristianissimo, al quale nessuno fu secondo, governava questo Regno, era il più grande fra tutti i principi, era copioso di tutto; illustre per stirpe, bellissimo di persona, era il fiore dei re, corona dei re, specchio dei guerrieri, decoro dei nobili, fiducia degli amici, terrore dei nemici, vita e forza del popolo, salute dei miseri, dei poveri e dei viandanti, fortezza dei lavoratori. Nel suo tempo era in vigore la legge, la giustizia” (da San Germano, 24).
Frederick II was the third and last power of that house. Some scholars have said that Dante uses the word wind or “vento” to indicate the strong, but sporadic force of the Swabian imperial authority in Italian politics or to imply that their power was violent or brief, but there may be another inspiration for that particular verbiage in Saba Malaspina’s chronicle. I previously quoted the following citation about Frederick’s love of the occult:

… con sottile ricerca indagava i segreti della natura, onorava a tal punto gli astrologi, gli stregoni e gli aruspici, che, in base ai loro presagi ed auspici, l’agilissimo pensiero di Federico vagava di continuo con rapido movimento come il vento.\(^{319}\)

I’ve highlighted the word “vento,” as this passage could be one of Dante’s potential reasons for using “vento” to refer to Frederick in Paradiso 3. Rather than a sporadic, brief or violent connotation, “vento” could also refer to Frederick’s brilliant mind, moving continuously like the wind.

While we learn that Constance was an empress, that she was Henry VI’s wife and Frederick II’s mother and that Dante feels a general sense of admiration for her by making her the brightest light in the moon, the main fact we learn about Constance in Paradiso 3 is that she was a nun who was pulled from her monastery against her will for a political marriage.\(^{320}\) Many commentators say that the Guelphs fabricated a legend

\(^{319}\) Malaspina, 16-17. Italics my own. Original Latin: “sicque dum subtili indagatone naturalia vestigabat, astrologos et nigromanticos adeo venerabatur et aurispices, quod eorum divinationibus et auspiciis Frederici velocissima cogitation ad similitudinem venti motu celery denuo vagabatur” (ibid, 14).

\(^{320}\) It should be mentioned that there was an appendix in Hugo Falcandus’ Liber de Regno Sicilie that was found in all four surviving manuscripts called the Letter to Peter, a propaganda pamphlet written to Peter, the treasurer of the Church of Palermo, protesting the claims to the succession of the Norman dynasty by Constance and her husband Henry VI. While the letter says nothing about the legend of Constance being a nun, it does present quite a negative view of the empress, which I believe makes the Liber even less likely of a source, as Dante shows nothing but admiration for Constance. The so-called Falcandus writes:
whereby Constance was more than 50 years old when she was pulled from the cloister and thus gave birth to Frederick past childbearing age. It is now generally thought by historians that Constance was never a nun. She was in fact 31 when she married Henry VI, an advanced age for the day, and gave birth at the age of 41. Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez say that Dante accepts the legend about Constance being pulled from the monastery at an old age but inverts its defamatory thrust by saying she never loosed the veil from her heart. This popular, well-known Guelph legend about Constance is actually very hard to come by.321

While there are many accounts that talk about her advanced age at the time of her marriage and Frederick’s birth, and one that even alludes to her virginity,322 there is just one source that explicitly states she was a nun: Thomas Tuscus’ Gesta Imperatorum et Pontificum.323 We established in Chapter 2 that Tuscus’ chronicle (which was a definite source of Villani’s) seems to have served as a solid potential source of information for Dante on the Battle of Colle di Val d’Elsa. It is commonly seen as derivative of Martin of Troppau’s work, but it was actually far more detailed. It tells the story of the Papacy and

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321 Perhaps commentators are aware of Villani’s presentation of Constance and are assuming he had his finger on the pulse of what was current during Dante’s writing of the Comedy as well. See the following from Book V, 16: “… il detto papa Clemente trattò coll’arcivescovo di Palermo… e fece ordinare al detto arcivescovo, che Costanza serocchia che fu del re Guglielmo, e diritta ereda del reame di Sicilia, la quale era monaca in Palermo, siccome addietro facemmo menzione, e era già d’età di più di cinquant’anni, si la fece uscire del munistero, e dispense in lei ch’ella potessa essere al secolo e usare matrimonio… la Chiesa la fece dare per moglie al detto Arrigo imperadore, onde poco appresso nacque Federigo secondo imperadore… E non sanza cagione e giudicio di Dio dovea riuscire si fatta ereda, essendo nato di monaca sacra, e in età di lei di più di cinquantade anni, ch’è quasi impossibile a natura di femmina a portare figliuolo; sicché nacque di due contrarii, allo spirituale, e quasi contra ragione al temporale.”

322 The Chronicle of Salimbene, 361.

the Empire from 1106 to 1278 and gives comprehensive information not just about the Hohenstaufens (they were the only Sicilian dynasty with an actual emperor) but also about the Normans. Tuscus stops writing before the Sicilian Vespers occurs, so unfortunately there’s no coverage of the Aragonese era of Sicily. Tuscus’ chronicle touches on almost every character from this chapter and gives us key information contained in the *Comedy*. He talks about Robert Guiscard, William II, Constance, Frederick, Pier delle Vigne, Manfred and Conradin (he does not write late enough to talk about Constance II and Peter III of Aragon). Even though Tuscus does not write up to the time of the Sicilian Vespers, he does name John of Procida as an inner member of the Hohenstaufen court.

Tuscus mistakenly calls Constance William II’s sister rather than his aunt. Salimbene, who identifies William as Constance’s father, makes a similar mistake. Since Dante does not specify in the *Comedy* William’s relation to Constance one way or the other, we cannot tell if Dante picked up on either of those errors, whether he thought William II was Constance’s brother, as Tuscus did, her father, as Salimbene did, her nephew, which was the truth, or whether he thought they were related at all. Salimbene further specifies his error when he says that William I was Robert Guiscard’s son (actually, he was Guiscard’s great nephew) and that William II had many sons and one daughter, Constance (in fact, he had no sons and Constance was his aunt). Salimbene does not give us the legend of Constance being ripped from her monastery. Instead, the

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324 Tuscus, 496, 498, 499.
325 Ibid, 498, 499, 510.
326 Ibid, 513.
327 Ibid, 523.
328 Ibid, 498.
329 *The Chronicle of Salimbene*, 357.
legend Salimbene weaves is very different from Dante’s: he says that William
commanded that his sons not give Constance in marriage, so they kept her with them
until she was 30 years old (and kept her a virgin), but she was a “perverse woman” who
caused trouble in the family and they wanted to get rid of her, so they married her off to
Henry VI.\textsuperscript{330} Salimbene never does say what happened to all of Constance’s brothers, or
why the Kingdom of Sicily would pass to her and not to them.\textsuperscript{331}

Tuscus is the only chronicler to identify Constance’s past as a nun, saying that she
was kept in a monastery in Palermo until the age of 50.

Sicque factum est, ut dicta Constantia servaretur a morte, et non sponte, sed
timore mortis quasi monacha nutriebatur in quodam monasterio monacharum…
Interea vivente Tancredo et regnante regis Guilielmi soro Constancia iam forte
quinquaginta annorum etatis erat, corpore non mente monacha in civitate
Panormitana…\textsuperscript{332}

Moving down Frederick’s bloodline, the next character we will discuss is
Manfred, Frederick’s illegitimate son and the King of Sicily. The Manfred episode is one
of the most discussed of the entire Comedy, mostly because scholars were so perplexed
by his salvation and placement in Purgatory. There is a twofold reason for that—

obviously, the fact that he died an excommunicate of the Church is the first red flag.\textsuperscript{333}

\textsuperscript{330} Ibid, 361.
\textsuperscript{331} Another legend about Constance that Dante doesn’t seem to buy is that she was not really Frederick’s
mother. Salimbene says that she was too advanced in age to get pregnant, so she paid a local butcher to
give her his son and pretended to be pregnant (ibid, 17).
\textsuperscript{332} Tuscus, 499.
\textsuperscript{333} Louis LaFavia discusses Dante’s decision to save Manfred at length in his essay “Per una
reinterpretazione dell’episodio di Manfredi.” According to LaFavia, while the first commentators
interpreted the Manfred episode as an exemplum of ecclesiastical doctrines, a complete opposite
interpretation arrived in the first years of the 19th century. Scholars began arguing that Dante was making a
polemic against the authority of the Church. LaFavia proves that in fact, Dante was following church
doctrine—not arguing against it. Pope Innocent III had written a letter in 1199 that became doctrine where
but also the fact that Dante didn’t save Manfred’s father, despite closely linking the two men together. If we take a look at the De Vulgari Eloquentia, we find a description of Frederick and Manfred that would suggest parity in Dante’s opinion of them:

Indeed, those illustrious heroes, the Emperor Frederick and his worthy son Manfred, knew how to reveal the nobility and integrity that were in their hearts; and, as long as fortune allowed, they lived in a manner befitting men, despising the bestial life. On this account, all who were noble of heart and rich in graces strove to attach themselves to the majesty of such worthy princes, so that, in their day, all that the most gifted individuals in Italy brought forth first came to light in the court of these two great monarchs. (DVE 1.12.4)

This is a perplexing passage because it paints a rather rosy picture of the two monarchs, whereas Dante suggests there is nothing redeeming about Frederick by his overall presentation in the Comedy.

Manfred’s placement in Purgatory has already been discussed at length by other scholars; what is of interest here is not necessarily Dante’s opinion of Manfred, but Dante’s knowledge of him: what facts of Manfred’s life Dante learned and where he learned them. The third canto of Purgatorio is in fact chockfull of historical details about Manfred’s life. We find Manfred at the foot of the mountain of Purgatory among the excommunicated. Dante describes him as blonde, handsome, of noble appearance, with

he stated that the judgment of the Church doesn’t determine by itself the condemnation of an excommunicate if it is contrary to the opinion of God. The Church wants to and has to absolve the excommunicate when there’s proof they repented before death.

Original Latin: “Siquidem illustres heroes Federicus Cesar et benegenitus eius Manfredus, nobilitatem ac rectitudinem sue forme pandentes, donec fortuna permansit, humana secuti sunt, brutalia dedignantes; propter quod corde nobiles atque gratarum dotati inherere tantorum principum maiestati conati sunt; ita quod eorum tempore quicquid excellentes Latinorum enitebantur, primitus in tantorum coronatorum aula prodibat; et quia regale solium erat Sicilia, factum est ut quicquid nostri predecessores vulgariter protulerunt, sicilianum vocaretur: quod quidem retinemus et nos, nec posteri nostri permutare valebunt.”
two sword blows to the brow and the chest: “Biondo era e bello e di gentile aspetto,/ ma
l’un de’ cigli un colpo avea diviso” (Purg. 3.107-108). We learn of Manfred’s second
wound here: “E mostrommi una piaga a sommo ‘l petto.” (Purg. 3.111) He later tells
Dante that these two mortal thrusts are what killed him. He also confesses to Dante that
his sins in life were horrible: “Orribil furon li peccati miei” (Purg. 3.21). Commentators
have pointed out that Dante might be describing Manfred’s physical appearance as such
because he’s making a direct reference to David, the Christian archetype of the penitent
who benefitted from the mercy of God. The citation is “Erat autem rufus et pulcher
aspectu decoraque facie” (1 Regum 16:12). However, as we will see, there are historical
descriptions of Manfred that matched Dante’s description perfectly.

The first of those sources is Tuscus’ *Gesta Imperatorum*. At first Tuscus does not
present Manfred as any kind of a hero and actually accuses him of killing his brother
Conrad with the help of an unnamed physician—a tale that in fact a lot of chroniclers
pick up on—as well as of killing his father. But then Tuscus paints this very positive
portrait of Manfred despite all of that: “Hic Manfredus, pulcerrimus corpore,
prudentissimus mente, strenuissimus opere, pius in subveniendo afflictis, largus in dando

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335 Several commentators have argued that Manfred’s wounds associate him with the risen Christ (who
repeatedly shows his wounds to his disciples) or to martyrs in general, as St. Augustine talks about martyrs
having wounds that remain in the body after death; their wounds bear witness to their violent death.
They’ve also noted that the head and breast are the bodily points of pride and rebelliousness.
336 Purg. 3.118-119.
337 Tuscus, 516. Paolino Pieri’s *Croniche delle città di Firenze* also accuses Manfred of killing his father
and his brother, but unlike Tuscus, he does not include a redeeming description of him whatsoever (Pieri,
Paolino. *Croniche Della Città Di Firenze.* Quaderni Per Leggere, Ed. Tonelli, Natascia and Giusti, Simone,
vol. 13, Lecce, Pensa multimedia, 2013). Latini is more elaborate in his accusations. He says Manfred
smothered his father’s face with a pillow while he lay on his deathbed and then poisoned his brother
Conrad and his brother Henry’s two young sons, like some kind of royal serial killer. Latini also says
Manfred tried to kill Conradin, but he was too well protected. Note, however, that in the VIII Latini 1375’s
version of the *Tesoro* the pillow-smothering episode is completely erased from existence, and there is no
accusation that Manfred poisoned his brothers Henry and Conrad.
emeritis, benignus et affabilis universis, ab omnibus amabatur.”

Tuscus says that Manfred was physically attractive, or specifically that he had a beautiful body, “pulcerrimus corpore.” He also says Manfred had a prudent mind, that he worked hard and that he was loved by everyone.

Salimbene also includes the accusation that Manfred killed his brother Conrad.

When he talks about Manfred’s death, he says the king merited such a death by his iniquities. “For he had committed many evil deeds,” which somewhat echoes Manfred’s words in Purgatory, “Orribil furon li peccati miei” (Purg. 3.21). Based on what is found in the Cronica alone, there is nothing that would inspire Dante to make a hero out of Manfred and save him from damnation, but Salimbene does allude to a section in his Tractatus pape Gregorii X where he fully describes Manfred’s good qualities. Unfortunately, as the work is lost, we will never be able to compare the information contained there with Dante’s.

It is Manfred’s description in Saba Malaspina’s Liber gestorum regum Sicilie that really bears consideration. Malaspina belonged to the Guelph party, which makes his character profile of Manfred even more interesting, because despite Manfred being the scion of everything the Guelphs hated, Malaspina ultimately described Manfred in a very positive light. See the following excerpt:

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338 Tuscus, 517.
339 He also claims John of Procida was the doctor who supplied Manfred with the poison to kill his brother. (The Chronicle of Salimbene, 482).
340 Ibid, 480.
341 Note that while Villani seems to share in this positive opinion of Manfred, in the same breath, he sees fit to denigrate the Sicilian king: “He played music and sang, and liked to see jugglers, courtiers, and beautiful concubines around him. Manfred always dressed in green. He was generous, courteous, and debonair, so that he was much loved and enjoyed great favor. But his whole life was Epicurean; he cared neither for God nor for the saints, but only for the delights of the flesh” (VI, 46).
In verità Manfredi, perché io non cessi di descrivere la sua generosità… fu nella sua condizione benigno, come dimostrato dal suo bell’aspetto. Fu anche virtuoso: infatti cercò di arricchire con i buoni costumi e con il sapere il suo animo… Fu anche magnanimo, come appre con evidenza del fatto che affrontò una così grande impresa, né si mostrò meno cortese con i familiari, egli che era dotato di ogni genere di grazie.\textsuperscript{342}

Malaspina then goes on to write that Manfred grew in beauty and goodness and merited being groomed by Frederick to become the next ruler, despite being an illegitimate son. He was also skilled in the liberal arts, exalted by the nobles for his virtues, and in possession of an incomparable culture and genteel manners.\textsuperscript{343} Malaspina’s most glowing review of Manfred is that Manfred “fra tutti i regnanti futuri poteva essere definito portatore di luce, sia perché, dotato di straordinaria bellezza e fornito di cultura letteraria, superava con le sue qualità gli altri, sia perché col suo zelo si rendeva amabile a tutti…”\textsuperscript{344}

If Dante was looking for an excommunicated hero to be his exemplum of God’s divine mercy, he has found it in Malaspina’s description of Manfred. We should also note that Malaspina does not accuse Manfred of murdering or plotting to murder any of his family members; he only says that it was Manfred who spread the rumor of Conradin’s death so that he could take the throne for himself. Finally, Malaspina’s physical

\textsuperscript{342} Malaspina, 37. Original Latin: “Manfredus sane, ut de ejus generositate, quae per superior patet, jam calamus conquiescat, fuit in sui statu benignus, cujus forma decora cum benignum necessario demonstrabat. Fuit etiam virtuosus: nam moribus et scientia decorare studuit animum… Fuitque magnanimos: quod evidenter apparat ex eo quod tantum negotium est aggressus. Nec minus se familiaribus exibuit gratiosum, qui gratiarum erat in se dotibus circumfultus” (ibid, 34-36).

\textsuperscript{343} Ibid, 13.

description of Manfred matches almost exactly to Dante’s. Compare Dante’s “Biondo era e bello e di gentile aspetto,” to Malaspina’s “Era biondo, con la faccia deliziosa, piacevola nell’aspetto.”

Other facts that we learn about Manfred in *Purgatorio* 3 are that his grandmother and daughter are both named Constance, his daughter is the mother of the honor of Sicily and Aragon (i.e. her sons Frederick and either Alfonso or James) and he died in Benevento. We learn more about Manfred’s death than his life. If we look to the other canto in which Manfred is alluded to, *Inferno* 28, we learn what led to his loss at the Battle of Benevento. Dante writes “e l’altra il cui ossame ancor s’accoglie/ a Ceperan, là dove fu bugiardo/ ciascun Pugliese” (16-17). This indicates that there was some sort of treachery or betrayal that occurred in Ceprano, a town on the border of Manfred’s southern kingdom, and that Dante believes men died there. Manfred also tells us much about his corpse and how it was disposed of. He narrates the actions of the men still alive on earth who decided the fate of his body. “Se ‘l pastor di Cosenza, che a la caccia/ di me fu messo per Clemente allora,/ avesse in Dio ben letta questa faccia,/ l’ossa del corpo mio sarieno ancora/ in co del ponte presso a Benevento,/ sotto la guardia de la grave mora.” *(Purg. 3.124-129)*. Thus Dante claims that the bishop of Cosenza, Bartolomeo Pignatelli, at Clement IV’s command, moved Manfred’s bones from where they were safely placed under a heavy cairn of stones at the bridge of Benevento to another location, which he specifies in the following verses: “Or le bagne e la pioggia e move il vento/ di fuor dal

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346 *Purg.* 3.144 and 113, respectively.
348 Ibid, 128.
regno, quasi lungo ‘l Verde,/ dov’ e’ le trasmutò a lume spento.”^349 Almost all Dante commentators are unclear what Dante meant by “fuor dal regno.” Villani reported the same piece of news but expanded a bit:

…per mandato del Papa il Vescovo di Cosenza il trasse (cioè il cadavere di Manfredi) di quella sepoltura, e mandollo fuori del Regno, ch’era terra di Chiesa (cioè da Benevento che faceva parte del regno papale), e fu sepolto lungo il fiume del Verde ai confini del Regno e di Campagna.”^350

However, Achille Lauri has argued that Manfred’s bones weren’t moved to the banks of the River Verde, but rather the River Liri, which was called the Verde during the Middle Ages because its waters were green.^351 Lauri believes that the regno Manfred is referring to is the papal territory of Benevento (it had been a papal possession since 1073), so his bones would not have been left in Ceprano, which was also papal territory, but north of Pontecorvo in some unspecified location.^352

As for the chroniclers’ description of the Battle of Benevento, their information is severely lacking in accounting for Dante’s knowledge. Tuscus strangely passes right over the Battle of Benevento and any details about Manfred’s death or burial or last-minute repentance. He actually never says that Manfred died. Latini does in fact mention the battle, but he does not report any of our pertinent information, such as Manfred’s barons’ betrayal at Ceprano. Salimbene, too, does not provide us with much information about Manfred’s death. He does mention that Charles crossed the bridge at Ceprano, but doesn’t say he was able to do so due to Manfred’s army abandoning their posts. He does

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^349 Ibid, 130-132.
^350 VIII, 9.
^352 Ibid, 113.
say he thinks Manfred’s brother-in-law, “Count Casertaro of Apulia” (whom other commentators identify as the Count of Caserta) betrayed Manfred. All Salimbene says about Manfred’s death is that he was defeated at Benevento and his body was buried at a bridge near Benevento—he does not mention the heavy cairn that the soldiers built upon him by dropping stones one by one. He also doesn’t mention the exhumation of Manfred’s body, though perhaps Salimbene thought that reflected badly upon the Church.

Our anonymous compiler of the VIII Latini 1375 version of the Tesoro, however, gives us one of the pertinent details we need about the Battle of Benevento—that there was a betrayal at Ceprano. The compiler writes that Manfred, knowing that Charles was on his way down from Rome, had closed all of the passes at the entrance to the kingdom. He then reports the following account about the Count of Caserta’s betrayal of Manfred:

Quando elli fue a ponte a Cepperano ed elli trovò lo conte di Caserta e il conte Giordano, il quale dovea guardare il passo con iim cavalieri. Quando elli dovieno vietare lo passo ed elli lo lasciarono andare, dicendo il conte di Caserta al conte Giordano, siccome traditore: Quando ne fieno passati alquanti e noi fediamo a loro. E ne lasciarono piue passare, e lo conte di Caserta disse: Non è tempo, chè troppo ne sono passati; e girò con la sua schiera e fece drappello e andossene a Caserta: e tutto questo non fece se non per tradimento, che’elli avea cerco convenzione col papa che li dovea far lasciare quella terra ched elli tenea e anco v’ebbe xxm once d’oro dalla corte di Roma.353

Here we are finally offered an explanation for how Dante knew what happened at Ceprano.

353 Due Cronache del Vespro, 101.
The compiler also allows Manfred to give a very heroic speech to his men before the Battle of Benevento, which could have contributed to Dante’s opinion of him as a hero worthy of the privileged role he’s given in *Purgatorio* 3. Manfred says to his men, “… e io voglio anzi morire re coronato in battaglia che scampare fuggendo di terra in terra, diserto, vituperato.”\(^{354}\) However, we still learn nothing about Manfred’s wounds in battle. A very descriptive honorable burying by Charles of Anjou follows on p. 102, including a ceremony with balsam and a marble tomb with an engraving of a crowned king on his horse—not the heavy cairn Dante describes. The compiler also says that Charles had Manfred buried “fuori da Benevento,”\(^{355}\) so there wouldn’t necessarily have been a need to move the body, but then the compiler mentions a very vague “tradimento” on the part of the Pope, without specifying what that was. The compiler also, to close Manfred’s story, links him to his daughter who was “la reina Gostanza moglie del re Piero da Ragona…”\(^{356}\)

Malaspina, too, offers us some key details about the Battle of Benevento. First of all, Malaspina makes reference to Dante’s accusation that every Pugliese “fu bugiardo” leading up to the Battle of Benevento when he writes that all of Manfred’s men told him they would follow him into battle, “anche se la maggior parte alla fine lo tradisce.”\(^{357}\) Malaspina mentions Ceprano as well, but rather than saying that Manfred’s men abandoned their posts there, he says that Manfred deployed his men to Ceprano and left

\(^{354}\) Ibid.
\(^{355}\) Ibid, 102.
\(^{356}\) Ibid. We also see the compiler say that Constance is the rightful heiress to the crown of Sicily in the *Leggenda di messer Gianni di Procida* (*Due Cronache del Vespro*, p. 68). John of Procida is speaking to Peter of Aragon: “Messer re di Raona, vorrestiti tu vendicare dell’onto e delle offensioni che ti sono fatte per lontano e per novello? chè hai piu onta e vitupero che mai avesse gran signore, siccome fu quello che lo re Manfredi lasciò a tua mogliera, e tu vile e codardo, non v’indendesti mai po’ esso a vendicare l’onta del nimico tuo, per lo tu avo che villanamente l’uccisero i Franceschi? Ora lo puoi vendicare, e racquistare tutto tuo dannaggio, se se’ prode e ardito.”
\(^{357}\) Malaspina, 101. Original Latin: “… plerique vero ipsum deinde produnt” (ibid, 100).
the other passages into the kingdom empty, allowing the enemies free access.\textsuperscript{358}

Malaspina gives an extremely detailed description of the Battle of Benevento and gives Manfred a very heroic death in battle, saying that preferring to die with his men rather than escape to some strange land, Manfred “si scagliò in mezzo ai nemici, combatté, ferì, fu ferito, fu sconfitta, ahimè così tradito dai suoi.”\textsuperscript{359} Unfortunately, despite how detailed the description of the battle is, Malaspina does not offer any depiction of Manfred’s specific wounds. He does say that Manfred’s body was covered by a mound of rocks and stones (placed, however, by a church, rather than a bridge) but doesn’t mention anything about the bishop of Cosenza ordering that it be exhumed and cast out of the kingdom. Like Salimbene, though, as a Guelph, perhaps Malaspina purposefully edited that out.

The final fact that we learn about Manfred in the \textit{Comedy}, which is perhaps the most controversial, is that even though he died excommunicated from the Church, he repented right before death: “Poschia ch’io ebbi rota la persona/ di due punte mortali, io/mi rendei/ piangendo a quei che volontier perdona.” (\textit{Purg.} 3.118-120). Not only did he repent right before death, but he suspects that no one knows that about him, and therefore even his daughter wouldn’t think to pray for him because she would assume he was damned to Hell. Manfred begs Dante to tell his daughter the truth of what happened at Benevento so that she may send him her good prayers and quicken his time in Purgatory: “… ond’io ti prego che, quando tu riedi,/ vadi a mia bella figlia, genitrice/ de l’onor di/Cicilia e d’Aragona,/ e dici ‘l vero a lei, s’altro si dice” (\textit{Purg.} 3.114-117).

\textsuperscript{358} Ibid, 105.
\textsuperscript{359} Ibid, 125. This echoes the presentation of the compiler of the vernacularization of the \textit{Tesoro}. Original Latin: “… inimicorum suorum ruit in medium, pgnat, percutit, percutitur, et expugnatur, proh dolor! A suis sic proditus” (ibid, 124).
In their commentary, Durling and Martinez say that Dante “seems to have been aware of reports of Manfred’s dying conversion.” But they then go on to say that the earliest surviving written report dates to the 1330s. Durling and Martinez do not name the source, but we can probably conclude that they are referring to Jacopo da Acqui’s *Imago mundi*, in which the author writes “… ‘quando rex Manfredus cecidit in morte, ultima verba sua fuerunt ista: Deus propitius esto mihi peccatorii.”

To say that Dante had gotten his information from an earlier source is problematic, because obviously 1330 is not prior to Dante. The argument, which finds its best proponent in Francesco Novati, is that the idea that Manfred repented before death was not original to Dante but must have been written down at some earlier point in time. Jacopo da Acqui and Benvenuto da Imola, one of the *Comedy*’s earliest commentators, are both pulling from some earlier tradition that narrated that Manfred, in his last breaths, turned to God’s infinite mercy. Novati writes: “Posto quindi che cotesta opinione corresse per la penisola già vivo l’Alighieri, difficilmente si potrebbe negare che l’avesse conosciuta e se ne fosse fatto l’eco nel poema immortale.”

Novati’s conviction that Dante was influenced by some popular story rather than da Acqui and Benevenuto being influenced by Dante is strong, but his evidence is slim. Even he has to admit in the end “Che l’Alighieri poi abbia conosciuto l’una or l’altra delle due tradizioni… io non oserei affermare.” In fact,

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362 He wrote “taluni dicono che Manfredi sul punto di morte tornasse a Dio.” This “taluni dicono” is what led Novati to believe the story was a popular tradition of his time.
363 Ibid, 6.
Manfred’s death-time penance is not mentioned by any of the chronicles I have been able to examine, even the ones we know for sure to be Dante’s sources.\(^{365}\)

The next in line after Manfred was Conradin, who Dante says very little about beyond his defeat by Charles of Anjou. That defeat, the Battle of Tagliacozzo, is first mentioned in *Inferno* 28, which we have already seen is the canto where Dante talks about all of the bloodshed in the south of Italy. He weaves his tale from Roman times all the way to the Battle of Tagliacozzo (1268). He writes “… e là da Tagliacozzo,/ dove sanz’ arme vinse il vecchio Alardo,/ e qual forate suo membro e qual mozzo/ mostrasse” (17-19). He does not mention Charles of Anjou quite yet. Instead, he names Érard de Valéry, lord of Saint-Valérien and Marolles and captain of Charles’ army, who advised Charles to keep his reserves hidden from Conradin until his opponents were scattered throughout the field, at which point Charles advanced with fresh troops. But Dante does not actually name Conradin until *Purgatorio* 20, when we meet Hugh Capet, the founder of the Capetian dynasty to which Charles of Anjou belonged, on the Terrace of Avarice. Dante writes “Carlo venne in Italia, e, per ammenda,/ vittima fé di Curradino” (67-68). Thus the facts we learn about Conradin are pretty simple—the name of the battle he lost to Charles of Anjou, the name of the military commander who beat his army “without arms,” Érard de Valéry, and that Charles of Anjou came into Italy and made a victim of Conradin. There’s also a definite emphasis on Conradin’s innocence.

While Paolino Pieri’s *Croniche* gives a pretty lengthy description of the Battle of Tagliacozzo, he does not seem to take a stand one way or the other on whether Conradin was an innocent victim and doesn’t name Érard de Valéry. Salimbene gives an equally matter-of-fact description of the battle with none of the key details Dante includes in the

\(^{365}\) Neither Malaspina nor Salimbene report it.
Comedy. In fact, that particular section of Salimbene’s *Cronica*, unlike the majority of the chronicle, almost seems to follow that annalistic style of presenting the facts, one by one, with no embellishment. Salimbene gives no sympathetic presentation of Conradin whatsoever.

Thomas Tuscus, however, does present Conradin as the innocent victim Dante would make him out to be, but he also does not mention Érard de Valéry’s role in the Battle of Tagliacozzo, and so could not account for all of Dante’s information. Finally, Latini also mentions the battle but does not report Érard de Valéry beating Conradin without arms. He does not even present Conradin as a victim—his beheading is presented rather matter-of-factly: “Conrad himself and the duke of Austria and many great lords were captured, and their heads were cut off. In this way the lineage of Emperor Frederick came to an end, so that from him or from his sons no seed remained on earth.”

The version of the *Tesoro* contained in the VIII Latini 1375 manuscript also does not name Érard de Valéry. However, the compiler’s description of Conradin’s beheading at the hands of Charles is certainly sympathetic: “E a quello punto si conturbò molti chuori e a pianti ed a lagrime e a fare condoglienze, vedendo il fiore del sangue di tutto il mondo e Curradino nato del legnaggio di undici imperadori, sotto la potenza della spada di crudelitade.”

Perhaps the most compelling candidate for Dante’s source of his description of Conradin is Saba Malaspina’s treatment of the young king. Malaspina presents Conradin as a Christ-like martyr. His beheading is described with extreme sympathetic detail, in which Conradin does not cry but simply waits patiently, hands clasped, trusting his soul

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366 *Li Livres Dou Tresor*, 60.
367 *Due Cronache del Vespro*, 104.
to God. Dante says that Charles made Conradin a victim, and Malaspina echoes the same sentiment when he writes, “… non muoveva il capo, ma si offriva come vittima…”

The horror of this slaughtering of an innocent young man culminates in the actual bloody deed. Malaspina writes, “Depositato dunque il suo sangue giovanile nel calice della crudeltà, il giovane fu gettato a terra morto: quel nobile tronco giacque senza vita, decapitato e senza voce.” However laudatory this presentation of Conradin is, though, Malaspina shows his Guelph sentiments immediately following, as he reflects on what this means for the Hohenstaufen dynasty. Despite his positive opinions of Manfred and Conradin, Malaspina must have truly hated Frederick, because he says of his bloodline, “Non germogliò più la radice di Federico, non sibilò più il serpente, né inghiottì più ciò che desiderava, né l’avidò possessore dirignava più i denti per l’ingiusta usurpazione”, somewhat echoing Latini’s sentiments.

Malaspina also provides us with the one key detail in Conradin’s battle at Tagliacozzo included in the Comedy. He names Érard de Valéry as Charles’ cunning military commander, a soldier of great stature who gives a speech to Charles’ army before the battle: “Essendo i Franchi atterriti per la sconfitta, Erardo di Valeri li incoraggia; anche Carlo li esorta e tutti si dichiarano pronti a combattere.”

The next two characters we will present together: Constance II and Peter III of Aragon, who were husband and wife. As we learned earlier, Constance was the very tail end of the Hohenstaufen line and became the last scion of the Ghibelline cause upon

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368 Malaspina, 189-191. Original Latin: “… nec divertebat caput, sed exhibebat se quas victimam” (ibid, 190).
370 Ibid, 191. Original Latin: “Radix non generat ulterius Frederici, nec serpens ulterius sibilat, nec absorbet suae comminationis effectum, nec vitiosa cupidus fremet amplius detention possessor” (ibid, 190)
Conradin’s death. In Purgatorio 3, we saw Manfred name her and ask Dante to tell her what really happened to him when Dante returns to the earth. Her name is of great importance in that canto because Dante is drawing an obvious bridge between her and her great-grandmother, the empress Constance, whom she was named after. Manfred is careful to position himself between these two great Constances. Malaspina’s presentation of Constance in his Liber comes the closest to matching Dante’s. In his section on Manfred, Malaspina says that Manfred gave his daughter, Constance, in marriage to Peter of Aragon.\textsuperscript{372} Keep in mind several other chroniclers did not find it necessary to tell the readers Constance’s actual name, including Salimbene.\textsuperscript{373} But in Malaspina’s chronicle, Constance is given her due respect as the heiress to the kingdom, and the ruler that the people of Sicily desired. Malaspina describes the people of Sicily as “sottomesso” under Charles’ rule, and if given the opportunity, they would gladly return to their “naturali signori,”\textsuperscript{374} i.e. Manfred’s lineage. He writes further that the Sicilians “…aspettavano con grande desiderio la venuta di Costanza, moglie del re di Aragona e quindi erede di Manfredi e della sua stirpe, desiderando profondamente di vivere sotto il dominio di colei…”\textsuperscript{375} It is not Peter of Aragon’s rule who the Sicilian people longed for, but Constance’s. Thus, Malaspina gives Constance the privileged position that Dante gives her in the Comedy.

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid, 61.
\textsuperscript{373} The Chronicle of Salimbene, 520. He mentions Manfred’s daughter being wed to Peter of Aragon but never actually names her. For Constance to remain a nameless face makes it unlikely that Dante learned of her from Salimbene.
\textsuperscript{374} Malaspina, 269. Original Latin: “Populus subjugalis ad naturalium dominorum suorum dominium libenter, si quando commode valeant, reveritur” (ibid, 268).
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid, 269. Original Latin: “Regnicolas dictam Constantiam, uxorem regis Aragonum, tamquam Manfredi haeredem, ejusque Constantiae sobolem amplis desideriis feliciter expectare venturam, et votive concupiscere sub ipsius dominio vivere” (ibid, 268).
We also already saw in *Purgatorio* 3 that Constance was the mother of the current rulers of the kingdoms of Sicily and Aragon. But Constance is named one last time in relation to her husband in *Purgatorio* 7. We are in the Valley of the Princes, and Dante spies Charles I of Anjou and Peter III of Aragon singing together in harmony. Despite the fact that they were both saved and both placed in Purgatory, we see Dante disparage Charles of Anjou a bit when he says, “… più che Beatrice e Margherita,/ Costanza di marito ancor si vanta”. Beatrice and Margherita were Charles’ wives, thus Constance can boast of a better husband—Peter—than they can. This is not the only insult Dante launches at Charles in this canto: he refers to Charles only as “colui dal maschio naso” and the “nasuto.” But Dante can only sing Peter’s praises and devotes much more of his beautiful poetry to the Aragonese king. He says that Peter, who is apparently a muscular soul, “d’ogne valor portò cinta la corda”. Dante, however, does not believe that Peter’s nobility passed on to his sons, and spends the next two terzinas lamenting Peter and Constance’s wasted genetic pool. The fact that Dante makes Charles and Peter harmonize together as friends, not foes, shows that he must have known of their bitter rivalry in life and the ways in which they fought each other after the Sicilian Vespers. One potential inspiration Dante could have been drawing from for his presentation of Peter and Charles is in fact Malaspina. Malaspina describes the struggles that ensued between Charles of Anjou and Peter of Aragon after the Sicilian Vespers for the final three books of his chronicle. Their bitter conflict provided the perfect earthly vice for Dante’s Purgatory to cleanse. Salimbene, too, is quite detailed about the two men’s
conflicts with each other, and also gives us a description of Peter of Aragon that would match Dante’s description of him as a strong, muscular man who was full of knightly valor. Salimbene writes, “Peter of Aragon was a man of great courage, ‘a strong man armed’… an expert in warfare.”

The Sicilian Vespers are in fact the last piece of knowledge that Dante possessed that we will dissect, because Peter and Constance were very closely tied to the rebellion. Dante makes reference to the Vespers in Paradiso 8 in the Heaven of Venus. Charles Martel is the character to whom Dante is speaking, and he laments not being the one to inherit the kingdom of Sicily, which instead passed into the hands of Charles I of Anjou. Martel refers to Sicily as the “bella Trinacria, che calig/ tra Pachino e Peloro sopra ‘l golfo/ che riceve da Euro maggior briga” (67-69). Martel’s allusion to the Sicilian Vespers is brief but unmistakable: “… se mala segnoria, che sempre accora/ li popoli suggetti, non avesse/ moo so Palermo a gridar: ‘Mora, mora!’” (73-75). The oppressed people of Palermo had to rise up against Charles. The verb “mora” is a third-person subjunctive with perhaps an implied subject of “any Frenchman.” As we will see shortly, it is in fact a key citation of Dante’s knowledge of the Vespers.

The final piece of information Dante professes to know about the Vespers is Pope Nicholas III’s involvement in the rebellion. He appears, very memorably, in Inferno 19, among the simoniacs, with his feet on fire. He mistakes Dante for Boniface VIII. Dante, somewhat uncharacteristically, unleashes his wrath on Nicholas and yells at him, “Però ti sta, chè tu se’ ben punito;/ e guarda ben la mal tolta moneta/ ch’esser ti fece contra Carlo ardito” (97-99). The money Dante’s referring to came from the Eastern emperor, Michael Palaeologus, who supplied Pope Nicholas with funds to aid the Sicilian rebellion against

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380 The Chronicle of Salimbene, 602.
Charles. Palaeologus, along with John of Procida, is one of the people most credited with inciting the rebellion, specifically by means of financing it with Byzantine gold.\footnote{Runciman, 293.}

We will now consider the principal texts that cover the time after Manfred’s death, the Sicilian Vespers and Peter III of Aragon’s ascension to the crown of Sicily. The first source to consider is one we have already mentioned: Pieri’s \textit{Croniche}. For concentrating primarily on Florentine affairs, Pieri speaks at length about the Sicilian dynasties. Granted, he does not talk about the Normans at all, and his coverage of the Hohenstaufens is paltry, but his coverage of the events that occurred closer to the time he was writing—at the beginning of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century—are far more detailed. The most detailed event in Pieri’s chronicle is in fact the Sicilian Vespers. He seems to buy the Aragonesi official line that they played no part in the rebellion. He says Peter of Aragon “arrivò in Cartagine, ma non fece quasi niente.”\footnote{Pieri, 52.} The very next sentence he writes is that Sicily rebelled against King Charles around that same time—as if the two events were unrelated. He then writes that the Sicilians went around killing Frenchmen until, in less than eight days, not a single Frenchman remained in Sicily. He says that Peter of Aragon, hearing this, went to Sicily “e di volere si fece loro re.”\footnote{Ibid, 53.} He does not, however, cite the words the rebellious mob cried out on the day of the vespers, “mora, mora!” He also says nothing of Peter of Aragon’s virtues.

The next important source devoted completely to the Sicilian Vespers is \textit{Lu Rebellamentu di Sichilta}, which we touched on briefly earlier. This work has a very complicated transmission history, which is muddled even further by its entanglement with Brunetto Latini’s \textit{Tresor}. The anonymous chronicle in the Sicilian dialect is said to
have been written in the 13th century by a Messinese and has three synoptic works based off of it: *Liber Jani de Procida et Palioloco*, *Leggenda di Messer Gianni di Procida* and a third text that we have already discussed, the VIII Latini 1375 manuscript, which interpolates a vernacularization of Latini’s *Tresor* with the legend, all Tuscan.\(^{384}\) There is no early surviving manuscript for the *Rebellamentu*, so scholars are unclear if the Tuscan variations were based off of it or if all of them were based off of an earlier, now lost source. As you can see from the titles of the various works, John of Procida, the Salernitan doctor who served in Frederick II’s court, is the main protagonist of the stories, as he was considered for a long time the sole author of the Sicilian Vespers and liberator of the island. In the *Rebellamentu* John appears as a hero, while in the three synoptic works he appears as a villain. Runciman believes that all of the texts could not have been written after 1298, the date when Procida deserted the Sicilian cause, because then he would not have come off as such a hero to the Sicilians or such a villain to the Guelphs.\(^{385}\) Villani, Boccaccio and Petrarch have all written about John of Procida.\(^{386}\) As mentioned before, Dante never talks about John of Procida in any of his works but seems to have known at least something of the larger legend, as the accusations that Pope Nicholas III accepted money to oppose Charles of Anjou come from that particular tradition.

The version of the *Tesoro* contained in the manuscript VIII Latini 1375 makes an extremely valid source for Dante’s historical knowledge precisely because of a certain moment in its retelling of the Sicilian Vespers. This is true for both the interpolation

\(^{384}\) For more information on the various redactions of this work, see Enrico Sicardi’s introduction to *Due cronache del Vespro*, iii-clxxix.

\(^{385}\) Runciman, 290.

found in the VIII Latini 1375 and the text of the *Leggenda di messer Gianni di Procida*—though, oddly, not true for the third variation, the *Liber Jani*. The moment comes when the citizens of Palermo go running through the streets calling out for every Frenchman to be killed. The citation from the *Leggenda* is as follows: “Tornaro in Palermo e cominciarono a gridare: *muoiono i Franceschi*, e fuoro in su la piazza tutti armati e assagliro il capitaneco che v’era per lo re Carlo, sicchè quelli vedendo questo fuggio nella mastra fortezza, e li Franceschi ch’erano sulla terra furo tutti morti.”\(^{387}\) Compare that to the citation from the VIII Latini 1375 manuscript: “Allora gli Franceschi trassero: e qui si cominciò una grande battaglia; si che i Palermitani ne stettero al peggio e perdenti; e tornarono in Palermo e incominciarono a gridare: *Muoi, muoi gli Franceschi*; e furono in sulla piazza tutti armati, e assalirono il capitano che v’era per lo re Carlo.”\(^{388}\) Finally, Malaspina, too, makes the citation of what the rebellious mob cried out: “Muoiano i Franchi, muoiano.”\(^{389}\) These Palermitans crying out, “death, death!” to the French perfectly aligns with Dante’s verse 75 of *Paradiso* 8: “mosso Palermo a gridar: ‘Mora, mora!’” It is the first time we have seen anything close to Dante’s direct citation, or, to cite, Maria Corti, *fonte diretta*, of a historical source.\(^{390}\)

Salimbene’s *Cronica* and Saba Malaspina’s *Liber*, taken together, along with details found in Thomas Tuscus and the *Rebellamentu/VIII Latini 1375*, almost fully account for all of Dante’s information about the Norman, Hohenstaufen and Aragonese dynasties of Sicily. His information that still cannot be accounted for is limited to: Guido

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\(^{387}\) *Due Cronache del Vespro*, 73. Italics my own.


\(^{390}\) Corti, Maria. “*La Commedia* di Dante e l’oltretomba islamico.” *Belfagor*, vol. 50, 1995, pp. 301-314. Though Salimbene describes the rebellion in Palermo with great bloody detail, he does not provide the key detail of the mob crying out, “Death to the French!”
Bonatti serving in Frederick’s court, Pier delle Vigne’s death by suicide, and a lot of information concerning Manfred and the Battle of Benevento. Dante does not necessarily need a source for Guido Bonatti, as Bonatti had authored his own treatise on astronomy and whose works and name Dante probably knew of even if he had not read them. Pier delle Vigne’s suicide is only attested in the aforementioned *Annales placentini Gibellini*, but barring that Dante had read that rather obscure work, we must assume he learned of the manner of delle Vigne’s death via oral tradition. The facts surrounding Manfred’s death at Benevento that we still cannot account for are plenty. First, Dante believes men died at Ceprano, but none of the chronicles considered specified any deaths taking place there. Second, none of the chronicles specify what type of wounds Manfred sustained in the Battle of Benevento—nothing about the brow and chest. Third, while we do have evidence for Manfred’s body being exhumed and moved to a second location, none of the chronicles considered name the Bishop of Cosenza as the culprit. Finally, no one reports Manfred’s death-time penance. The Manfred episode is really the only one still somewhat shrouded in mystery.

When one probes into Salimbene’s motivations for writing his chronicle, and the things he’s most concerned with, it makes sense why Dante would have trusted in him as a source for historical information.\(^1\) Salimbene, like Dante, clearly saw his era as one of violence, lawlessness and ambition. Both he and Dante thought that they might be able to anticipate what was coming by carefully scrutinizing the present and the past. As was discussed in chapter 1, this is an influence of the teachings of Joachim of Fiore, whose

\(^1\) The best article to date written on Dante and Salimbene’s similarities is Bernini, Ferdinando. “Dante e Salimbene.” *Convivium*, vol. 8, 1936, pp. 49-57. It’s a short article but the only one that sets out with the specific purpose of comparing the *Cronica* with the *Comedy*. For a general overview of Salimbene’s chronicle, see Novati, Francesco. “La Cronaca di Salimbene.” *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* vol. 1-2, 1883, pp. 381-423.
presence is the one constant throughout Salimbene’s chronicle. Joachim’s disciples created a general culture during Dante’s lifetime of prophetic expectation, which Dante seems to have bought into, with all of his own prophecies that we find in the Comedy, like the veltro or the 515. Salimbene shared Dante’s belief that a new era was coming, where the quality of living would be improved by an overall feeling of peace. Salimbene was a man who believed that by reflecting on the meaning of events in time, one might be able to interpret what the future held, which made him the perfect source for Dante to learn contemporary history from. Salimbene also quotes Scripture at every possible opportunity, sometimes distractingly so. Again, when Dante set out to write the journey of a Christian pilgrim through the three realms of the afterlife, an epic poem in which he himself would be quoting Scripture extensively, a chronicle where the Christian meaning of history was spelled out in plain writing at every possible turn would have matched up seamlessly with the vision he had for his own work.

The translator of Salimbene’s chronicle, Joseph Baird, believes that Dante and Salimbene share similarities on a stylistic level as well. Perhaps Dante wanted to emulate Salimbene’s portraits of the important men of his time because of their level of detail that was striking to the reader, details that left a lasting, unforgettable impression. Perhaps he set out to accomplish the same thing with his portraits of Farinata, Pier delle Vigne and Ugolino. Baird writes, “Few medieval writers… have managed to capture so fully the spirit of an age by means of so large an array of discrete, particularized, historical

See for example, Joachim’s prophecy about Frederick II, which he tells to Frederick’s father, Henry VI, when he asks about his young boy’s future. According to Salimbene, Joachim responded, “O Prince, your boy, your son, your heir is perverse and evil. Ha! God! He will shake the earth ‘and shall crush the saints of the most High’” (The Chronicle of Salimbene, 5). Initially, Salimbene had thought that Frederick was the warrior-king whose life would lead to the reign of the Antichrist before the Last Judgment, a prophecy by Joachim, but then when he died suddenly, he concluded that he actually fulfilled a different prophecy of Joachim’s, that the empire would come to an end.
characters starkly depicted in all their greatness and triviality.” Dante was certainly one to pay attention to the distinguishing details of a man’s personality, his very essence—Farinata’s pride, Ugolino’s self-pity, Pier delle Vigne’s perverse love for his master—just as Salimbene possessed an unerring ability to do the same, even with famous men he never knew personally.

Salimbene’s damning portrait of Frederick’s Epicureanism, even his imagery of Michael Scot locking a man’s body up in a cask to see if the soul escaped upon death, was enough to inspire Dante to create the world of the Cemetery of the Epicureans, where these men’s bodies are locked inside their own casks for all of eternity, their souls never escaping, Frederick chief among them (Inferno 10). Similarly, Malaspina’s narration of the poor, innocent Conradin, so patient and courageous, just quietly waiting, hands clasped, for his head to be cut off his body, certainly explains why Dante would say that Charles “vittima fé di Curradino” (Par. 8. 55-69). And Malaspina’s depiction of handsome, brave Manfred, bringer of light, man of arts and letters, loved by all, who threw himself into battle with his men, knowing he was going to die, because the dishonor of scurrying off like a coward went against who he was, would certainly have inspired Dante when he was searching for his hero excommunicate who could serve as the exemplum of the greatness of God’s mercy, a character who agreed perfectly with the doctrine of the church about excommunication (Purgatorio 3).

What is so interesting about these three depictions serving as Dante’s inspiration for the way he wanted to paint these men in his own work is that Dante could have read them at different times, at different periods in his writing process. If he had read

Salimbene first (remember that Salimbene’s Cronica and Malaspina’s Liber were both

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393 “Introduction” to The Chronicle of Salimbene, xix.
completed around the late 1280s/early 1290s, so both would have been circulating when Dante was writing in the early 1300s), then he might have been very inspired by Salimbene’s characterization of Frederick, Salimbene’s ability to capture the man’s very essence, the tawdry details of his experiments, the depths of his depravity laid out in extremely descriptive language. But perhaps Dante would not have thought one way or the other about Salimbene’s presentation of Manfred and Conradin, as the chronicler did not seem to probe their characters the way he was able to do with Frederick. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Salimbene does not give much descriptive detail about their personalities or their actions. So perhaps Dante left them by the wayside, but he ran with the imagery of Frederick paying for his sins in a fiery tomb as he was writing the *Inferno*.

Dante almost certainly read Salimbene before he wrote the *Convivio*, because of the information he includes about Asdente in that work. Dante’s presentation of Frederick in the *Convivio* is pretty neutral—he only says that Frederick was the last of the Roman emperors. However, his presentation of Frederick in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is overwhelmingly positive. We don’t know the exact dates of composition for those two works, just that the *DVE* was written between 1302 and 1305 and the *Convivio* was written between 1304 and 1307. Their compositions could have overlapped, but since the *Convivio* was finished slightly later than the *DVE*, it is possible Dante had not read Salimbene’s chronicle at the time he was writing the *DVE* and only read it before he started his work on the *Convivio*.

Some time after Dante completed writing *Inferno* 10, Dante could have then read Malaspina, and Malaspina could have jolted that creative energy of Dante’s, with these
full, rounded characterizations he gave of Manfred and Conradin. A history, yes, but with so much color and detail, so much inspiration. If Dante already knew he wanted an Ante-Purgatory with a section specifically for the excommunicates, he knew he would have to talk to someone, someone polarizing, someone well known, someone heroic. When reading Malaspina’s words, “fu nella sua condizione benigno… fu anche virtuoso… fu anche magnanimo… era dotato di ogni genere di grazie”,394 knowing very well that Manfred had died an excommunicate of the Church (nearly every chronicle at least reports that much) Dante could have had an aha! moment; he found his exemplum. And finally, when writing the Paradiso, and feeling a need to address what was happening in Sicily in the present day and to trace it back through what had happened previously in history, when he mentioned Conradin, he didn’t leave him as a neutral character who he felt nothing about one way or the other, as Salimbene had. He remembered the scene that Malaspina had painted, of poor, innocent Conradin, at the moment of his decapitation, who did not cry, who did not move his head, who offered himself as a victim to God. Let us not forget, finally, Malaspina’s presentation of Manfred’s daughter, Constance. He gives us her name, first of all, which Dante needs for his poetic symmetry, but he also gives us her piety, her goodness, how the people of Sicily wanted her as their ruler. He gives Dante, that is, someone whose prayers you would want back on earth.

At least that is one hypothesis, and it is a hypothesis that can only arise from this kind of research; for if we do not scrutinize Dante’s historical sources, we are missing

key, deliberate decisions that he is making, decisions that tell us something about the way he felt about the world around him and the men who came before him. We can determine if he trusted written sources more than he did the spoken word—history, more than gossip. Or if he just went with what served his story best. For instance, Manfred’s death-time penance. It cannot be found in any written source pre-dating Dante. Did Dante just hear about it, a piece of gossip circulating among his cultural milieu? Did he read it in a source that has been lost? Or did he invent it himself because it suited his growing Ghibelline sympathies? You can’t have a saved excommunicate who did not repent before he died, after all. Manfred suspects that his own daughter does not know that he is in Purgatory and therefore would not think to pray for his soul. That means his repentance would not have been a widely-circulating fact in 1300. It gives even more credence to the likelihood that this penance was in fact Dantean invention.

We did find the story of Constance being a nun who was removed from her monastery for the purposes of a political marriage in Thomas Tuscus, but Tuscus does not say anything about it being against her will. It is entirely plausible that she was in there in the first place against her will. Tuscus’ job as a historian is not to tell us. So where did Dante learn that? Or did he learn it at all? Again, it would not make sense to have a nun who broke her vows end up in Heaven if she wanted to leave the monastery of her own volition. It also would not be very poetic for her name to be Constance if she had no constancy of will.

We can also learn something about whom Dante left out of his Comedy and why. When the pool is the entirety of the peninsula of Italy as well as some French and German and Spanish, really anyone who lived before the year 1300, that task becomes
overwhelming and impossible. But when the pool becomes much smaller, i.e. just the principal players in one chronicle, or even just the principal rulers, that task becomes feasible. Take, for instance, when Dante needed a ruler to be his exemplum among the excommunicates of Purgatory. It seems that Salimbene’s chronicle would have suggested King Enzo of Sardinia as the proper choice, for he was excommunicated right alongside his father, in 1239. Salimbene writes of Enzo, “Of all of Frederick’s sons, however, the finest, in my opinion, was Enzio, King of Sardinia, whom the Bolognese captured and kept in prison for many years until his death.”395 Prison seems like a good time to repent and ask for God’s forgiveness. But Dante does not put Enzo, allegedly “the finest” of all Frederick’s sons, in the Comedy at all. We can be certain Dante had read Salimbene’s chronicle, and that is just one character whom Dante did not feel deserved the reverence Salimbene had given—how many others are there?

By scrutinizing Dante’s sources, we have strong elements to hypothesize which choices were poetic inventions and which were not. There are, of course, errors in the Comedy, facts that the historical record show just are not true. But if we can trace where that error came from, we can see if Dante is picking it up from someone else, someone whose chronicle he trusts, or if he is making the error himself, deliberately. Dante seems to think there was some sort of battle or exchange of blows at Ceprano, because bones are still being collected there. If there are any other chronicles out there that we have not examined yet in this chapter that also erroneously report that information, then we have our explanation. But if we could determine that that information is not contained anywhere, not even a trace of it being circulated through oral tradition, or something the early commentators say was “common knowledge,” then perhaps when you turn back to

395 The Chronicle of Salimbene, 480.
the canto you see that it just sounds better, that maybe Dante wanted to talk about all of
the battles in Apulia and he needed something to rhyme with Roberto Guiscardo, and
bugiardo was the best he had, but the lying happened at Ceprano, not Benevento, so he
had to combine the two events into one. While my present research was too broad in
scope to make a very nuanced argument like that, the goal is to push future scholarship
down that path.
CHAPTER 4: How Dante Got His News

The *Divine Comedy* is filled with real people who lived at the same time as Dante. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, about one third of all the characters in the *Divine Comedy* were alive between 1265 and 1321. These were not all neighbors, colleagues or friends of Dante’s; the majority of them were complete strangers, people he could have only learned about indirectly. The link that binds these characters’ stories is their relevance to the current events of Dante’s time: murders, robberies, arrests, freak accidents and forgeries that today would make it into the *cronache nere* but were instead recorded by Dante and made eternal in his poem. In this way we might consider Dante a sort of proto-journalist, an author who paid attention to and wrote about the most interesting or important events of his time.

The characters I have selected for this chapter run the gamut of salacious happenings in and around Tuscany, brilliantly illustrating the type of “news” most likely to make its way to Dante. We will discuss Adamo of Brescia, who counterfeited gold florins, Benincasa d’Arezzo, who was beheaded by Ghino di Tacco, Guccio de’ Tarlati, who drowned in the Arno after being pursued by the Bostoli family, Guercio de’ Cavalcanti, killed by the villagers of Gaville, Lano Maconi, a member of the spendthrift brigade, Pia de’ Tolomei, who was possibly killed by being thrown out a window, Sassolo Mascheroni, who was rolled through town in a barrel full of nails, Ugolino, who was imprisoned in the Torre dei Gualandi with his family and starved to death, Vanni Fucci, who stole from the church of San Zeno, Friar Gomita, who took bribes from prisoners, and Friar Alberigo, who murdered his brother and nephew in grand fashion.
The stories of these particular characters were not just chosen for their scandalous nature but also their timing and geographic locations. All of these events unfolded before 1302—that is, before Dante went into exile and his whereabouts became far more uncertain. By placing Dante firmly in Florence and finding current events that occurred outside of Florence, we can confirm that this news had to travel. But it usually did not have to travel far. It is interesting to note that the majority of this news is still clustered around Tuscany—Siena, Pistoia, Gaville, Maremma, Pisa, the Casentino, Faenza. The furthest news sources traveled from Rome and Sardinia, though due to Sardinia’s close ties to Pisa at that time, that distance might be a little misleading. Thus we can conclude, understandably, that Dante was mostly likely to learn news that did not have to travel great distances to reach him. While I would have also liked to include the news that Dante learned while he was writing the *Comedy* in exile outside of Florence, because we have so many gaps in our knowledge about his whereabouts, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint him geographically and therefore determine that said news would have had to travel to reach him. Therefore, I will not be addressing any newsworthy events after the date of 1302.

In summary, the characters I have selected all fit the following criteria: they lived outside of Florence and thus news of their lives had to travel to reach Dante, they were involved in some type of newsworthy event that occurred before 1302 (when we know Dante was still in Florence for the most part), and Dante did not know them personally. One further filter I applied in my selection of characters was that I did not want to include any whom have been researched exhaustively. For example, I omitted Francesca da

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396 The exception here is Sassolo Mascheroni, who was from Florence. His case was included to demonstrate the influence of oral tradition on the *Comedy*, as we will discuss later in this chapter.
Rimini, whose newsworthy murder was committed outside of Florence, before 1302, and whom Dante did not know personally. Due to intense interest in the Paolo and Francesca episode of *Inferno* 5, scholars have exhausted all possible historical sources for the story of their love and Francesca’s subsequent murder and came up empty-handed.

Due to their sensational nature, all of these events would have warranted the attention or gossip of the citizens of Tuscany. This chapter seeks to understand how news spread in medieval Tuscany, considering all written and oral sources common to the times, including letters, poems, paintings, gossip, recitations, and, of course, chronicles. While oral sources must have played a large part in the transmission of news, the question remains whether there were written forms of communication that survive today that Dante consulted while writing his poem. After all, the lives, sins, and deaths of 115 people are a lot to keep trapped away in one’s memory. But to truly understand the vastness of the news-related information contained in the *Divine Comedy*, we must first locate the facts within the poem itself.

We will begin with the earliest event of this chapter—Master Adam’s forging of counterfeit gold florins for the Conti Guidi of the Casentino Valley around 1280/1281.  

Dante typically tends to know—or purports to know—three basic facts about his

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397 Much has been made about Master Adam’s identity, especially where he was born. Gregorio Palmieri found a Bolognese document from 1277 identifying a “magistro Adam de Anglia, familiar Comitum de Romena,” which would make him English (See Palmieri, *Introiti ed esiti di Papa Niccolò III*, 1279-1280. Rome, Tipografia Vaticana, 1889, pp. xxv-xxvi). Francesco Torraca put forward his thesis that Adam was from Borgata of Agna in the Casentino, while the early commentators have suggested everything from the Casentino (Graziolo Bambaglioli), to Bologna (Anonimo Selini), to Brescia (Benvenuto da Imola). The question of his homeland remains unsolved, though there’s good evidence to suggest that he was at least living in Bologna in the 1270s, if not actually from there. Giovanni Livi believes Master Adam was in Bologna in October of 1277, before passing on into the service of the Conti Guidi. He also agrees with Guido Zaccagnini that an Adam mentioned in an act of 1274 (“Adam qui fuit de Brexia”) could also be Dante’s Master Adam. There were, after all, many Englishmen living and studying in Bologna at the end of the 13th Century (Livi, Giovanni. “Un personaggio Dantesco: Maestro Adamo e la sua patria.” *Giornale dantesco*, vol. 24, 1921, p. 268). For a document mentioning an “Adam de Carlolo provincie Angliane,” see ibid, 269. See also Contini, Gianfranco. “Sul XXX dell’Inferno.” *Paragone*, vol. 44,1953, footnote 1, p. 7.
characters: when they died, how they died, and how they sinned. Sometimes the newsworthy event that spreads to Dante in Florence is the manner of the person’s death itself rather than the crime—or sin—committed; sometimes it is the opposite. Here we have a case where the crime committed is what makes it newsworthy enough to travel from the Casentino to Florence, and the manner of Master Adam’s death is simply a consequence of that crime, resulting in the two pieces of news traveling together. We find Master Adam in *Inferno* 30 in the tenth *bolgia* of Hell, suffering from dropsy, which distorts his body into the shape of a lute. He is placed with Gianni Schicchi among the impersonators. Dante devotes much space to Master Adam’s story, demonstrating that he was quite informed about the salient facts of the event.

Dante locates the events first and foremost within the Casentino valley when he writes, “Li ruscelletti che d’i verdi colli/ del Cassentin discendon giuso in Arno,/ faccendo i lor canali freddi e molli” (*Inf.* 30.64-66). In lines 70-71, Dante further specifies that this is in fact the location in which Master Adam sinned. The Casentino is a mountainous region east of Florence, which includes the upper basin of the Arno and was then run by the Conti Guidi. The remains of their castle at Romena still exist today. Dante continues Master Adam’s story by delving into the newsworthy event that made its way to Dante’s Florence: “Ivi è Romena, là dov’ io falsai/ la lega suggellata del Batista,/ per ch’io il corpo su arso lasciai” (*Inf.* 30.73-75). Master Adam specifies that his brand of “impersonation” was falsification of coinage and that that coinage was the gold florin (i.e. the coin with John the Baptist, Florence’s patron saint, engraved on its face) and that he died at the stake in Romena for his sin (where his body was left burned up). In fact, the city of Florence had him burned alive in 1281, a customary punishment for __398 “La rigida giustizia che mi fruga/ tragge cagion del loco ov’ io peccai”__
counterfeiting, which was considered a crime against the state. We then understand even more of Dante’s newsgathering about the event when Master Adam mentions the three men responsible for the act—the Conti Guidi—specifically Guido, Alessandro, and “their brother,” who must either be Aghinolfo or Ildebrandino, since there were actually four brothers. Master Adam blames the Conti Guidi completely for his sin and craves revenge against them.\(^{399}\) We also know that Dante knows that one of these brothers has already passed away, as Master Adam says “Dentro c’è l’una già” (Inf. 30.79). This must refer to Guido II da Romena, who is the only brother who died before 1300, the date of Dante’s journey. Finally, we learn that Dante was well informed about the minutest details of the event, as he further specifies that Master Adam’s falsified florins contained precisely three carats of dross, i.e. only 21 gold carats rather than the legal standard of 24.\(^{400}\) The canto ends with a verbal altercation between Master Adam and Sinon\(^{401}\) in which we learn that Dante judges Master Adam greatly for his crime, putting these words in Sinon’s mouth: “… ‘e son qui per un fallo,/ e tu per più ch’alcun altro demonio!” (Inf. 30.116-117). Accordingly, we must understand that every single false coin forged by Master Adam counts for one sin, and therefore he sinned more than any other demon in Hell, because he produced so much fake money. Interestingly enough, Dante-Pilgrim wants to stay and listen to Sinon and Master Adam fight, but Virgil scolds him for his prurient interest (Inf. 30.148).

\(^{399}\) Ma s’io vedessi qui l’anima trista/ di Guido o d’Alessandro o di lor frate,/ per Fonte Branda non darei la vista.” (Inf. 30.76-78).

\(^{400}\) “… e’ m’indussero a batter li fiorini/ ch’avevan tre carati di mondiglia” (Inf. 30.88-90).

\(^{401}\) Sinon is included in this *bolgia* for his deception toward the Trojans.
In sum, the news Dante knew about Master Adam’s crime are as follows: the crime took place in the Casentino,402 Master Adam falsified coins, specifically gold florins, he was burned alive at the stake for his crime (an assumption can be made that Dante knew the date of that as well, or at the very least that it was before 1300), Master Adam believes the Conti Guidi are the ones truly culpable of the crime and names two of them—Guido and Alessandro, Guido is already dead, Master Adam added exactly three carats of dross to the gold florins and produced many of them.

We must also consider the possibility that Dante learned firsthand from the Conti Guidi themselves about the sequence of events that led to Master Adam’s sentence to death. Dante’s relationship with the Conti Guidi is complicated and shrouded in mystery. His first possible involvement with them was in June 1302 when the White Guelf exiles and Ghibellines met at the convent of San Godenzo; Dante was there representing the Whites with Vieri dei Cerchi, while Aghinolfo was serving as the military captain of the Whites. Aghinolfo was one of the four brothers of the Romena branch of the Conti Guidi (the ones who commissioned Master Adam to falsify the florins). Dante would seem to have also known Aghinolfo’s sons, Oberto and Guido, as he addresses his Epistle 2 as follows: “Hanc epistolamo scripsit Dante Alagherii Oberto et Guidoni comitibus de Romena post morten Alexandri comitis de Romena patrui eorum condolens illis deo obitu suo.” He writes this letter as a condolence upon the death of their uncle, Alessandro da Romena, who is one of the four brothers responsible for Master Adam’s forgery. He put the brother who had died before 1300, Guido, in Hell, so the exaltation of this brother comes across as a bit perplexing.

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402 Note, that that is where Master Adam counterfeited the coins, but he actually tried to use them in Florence, where he was caught and then burned at the stake.
Even more confusing is the fact that Dante signs his letters to Henry VII and the Florentines from “sub fontem Sarni,” which most likely refers to the Guidi castle of Porciano, posted at the base of the Falterona. This would imply that the Conti Guidi of Porciano gave Dante hospitality in 1311, when he was writing his letters. But Dante also wrote these verses about them in the *Comedy*: “Tra brutti porci, più degni di galle/ che d’altro cibo fatto in uman uso,/ dirizza prima il suo povero calle.” (*Purg.* 14.43-45).

Robert Davidsohn believes Dante was a guest at the castle at Porciano in 1311, probably of Guido di Modigliana, a nephew of either Tegrimo or Tancredo of the *conti* of Porciano.403

Whether or not Dante ever discussed Master Adam’s crime with the Guidi in person is almost beside the point. Dante would have been 16 when news of Master Adam’s forging of gold florins would have made its way to Florence. Something that upsetting to the Florentine economy, a threat to its financial interests and prestige on the international stage, would have caused an absolute uproar among the citizens of Tuscany. Any 16-year-old living in Florence would have heard about it.

The next two newsworthy events we will consider have unknown dates, but thanks to Dante, we must assume they occurred before 1300 for the souls of the men responsible for them to be present in the afterlife. Those souls are Francesco “Guercio” de’ Cavalcanti and Sassolo Mascheroni. Cavalcanti and Mascheroni are linked in one other way as well: it would seem the events of their lives that would make them newsworthy names were not necessarily the crimes they committed but the manner in which they died. In fact, all Dante even says to identify Cavalcanti—all he says about

him at all—is that he made the town of Gaville, near Figline in the upper valley of the Arno, weep (“l’altr’ era quel che tu, Gaville, piagni.” (Inf. 25.151). It is an opaque reference to the fact that the people of Gaville murdered Cavalcanti and in return his family savagely avenged his death, making the town “weep.” Dante does not spell out what the Cavalcanti family’s exact deeds in Gaville were, but the Anonimo fiorentino tells us that they killed and tormented many of the townspeople. Despite the fact that Cavalcanti is found in the seventh bolgia, home of the fraudulent thieves, Dante gives no indication as to what Cavalcanti stole or why Dante knows of him as a thief. The information known about this event seems tied to an oral tradition, a colloquial expression passed on through the years, rather than something that arrived in Florence urgently from Gaville and that Dante heard in the streets immediately after it happened.

The next soul, Sassolo Mascheroni, was also noteworthy as much for the manner of his death as for his crime. Dante obviously knew what his crime was, since he’s placed in the ninth circle, Cocytus, with traitors to kindred: Mascheroni murdered a kinsman for an inheritance. But Dante might also have known about the manner of his death, especially since it actually took place in Florence and therefore did not have to travel from elsewhere. Mascheroni was rolled through the streets of Florence in a casket full of nails and then beheaded. Obviously this manner of being putting to death would have drawn much attention from the citizens of Florence, perhaps Dante included (though we do not know the exact date it occurred and therefore how old Dante would have been). Dante says nothing about the manner in which Mascheroni died, however. Aside from his name and his placement in Cocytus, the only other thing we learn from Dante about him is this: “… se Tosco se’, ben sai omai chi fu.” (Inf. 32.66). If you are a Tuscan, you know
who he was. This is one of the most striking examples in the Comedy of evidence of a
strictly oral tradition being passed down through the generations. We might never know
whether Dante witnessed Mascheroni’s very public death in Florence or whether Dante
knew precisely which kinsman Mascheroni had killed for an inheritance. What we do
know is the importance the role of gossip or the oral transmission of news played in
Dante’s knowledge of this particular character’s life. Dante almost definitely had no
written source; he did not need one, because Mascheroni’s story had become common
knowledge to all the citizens of Tuscany, something a Tuscan simply just remembered
because he or she had heard it so many times.

The next newsworthy event occurred in 1285, and it is the story of how Friar
Alberigo murdered his relatives at a banquet. Dante’s knowledge of this tale also has
strong hints of it coming down to him through oral tradition. Dante encounters Friar
Alberigo, like Mascheroni, in Cocytus, in the division of Ptolomea, reserved for those
who murder guests; he is frozen up to his face and his tears turns to painful icicles. He
immediately identifies himself by his sin, which must be so well known, one only needs a
few key words to recognize it: fruits, evil. “… ‘I’ son frate Alberigo,/ i’ son quel da le
frutta del mal orto,/ che qui riprendo dattero per figo.” (Inf. 33.118-120). This refers to
the signal that Alberigo allegedly gave his assassins during the point in the meal in which
he desired to kill his family: “Vengan le frutta”—let the fruits come. A simple saying like
that would have been easy to pass on accurately from one town to another, from year to
year. Other phrases sprouted from it like “the fruits of friar Alberigo.” Whether Dante’s
“fruits of the evil orchard” was his own invention or merely another iteration of the oral tradition is unknown.\textsuperscript{404}

What is striking about this episode is that Friar Alberigo was not dead during the setting of the \textit{Comedy} in 1300. He was still alive in the spring of 1302 in Ravenna, where he made a will (though he was originally from Faenza), and seems to have died around 1307. Therefore, Dante did not only need to possess information about Alberigo’s famous misdeed, he also had to know that Alberigo was still alive in 1300. How a man so infamous for his crime that all of Tuscany spoke of it was never convicted and sentenced to death is unclear, and Dante must have known that. Thus, he creates this sort of exception for people as evil as Alberigo: their bodies remain on earth but are possessed by a demon, while their souls are sent down to be tortured in Hell from the moment they commit their heinous sin.\textsuperscript{405}

The next event took place in 1288, though it would seem that it was probably not the event that led Dante to first hear about this character: Arcolano (Lano) da Squercia Maconi. For the event that took place in 1288 was Lano’s death at a battle near Pieve al Toppo, and while Dante does directly cite this battle and Lano’s alleged cowardice during it, what Dante most likely would have known Lano for was his involvement in the Brigata Spendereccia of Siena. The notorious spendthrift brigade was a crew of about 12 rich young Sienese men who combined their fortunes into one fund and squandered it in a


\textsuperscript{405} "Ed elli a me: ‘Come `l mio corpo stea/ nel mondo sù, nulla scienza porto./ Cotal vantaggio ha questa Tolomea,/ che spesse volte l’anima ci cade/ innanzi ch’Atropòs mossa le dea.’ (\textit{Inf.} 33.122-126). “…sappie che, tosto che l’anima trade/ come fec’io, il corpo suo l’è tolto/ da un demonio, che poscia il governa/ mentre che ‘l tempo suo tutto sia vòlto;’ (\textit{Inf.} 33.129-132)."
mere 20 months by throwing elaborate parties and banquets.\footnote{Pietro Rossi says that the spending lasted 10 months and by the end of those 10 months, the brigata had spent 216,000 florins. They fell into misery and were reduced to beg on the streets and recover in the hospital. Rossi, Pietro. “Dante e Siena.” \textit{Bullettino senese di storia patria}, vol. 28, 1921, p. 41.} This was in the late Duecento, so obviously not all of them had died by 1300, but of the date and manner of Lano’s death, Dante was sure, and thus could include him in the Wood of the Suicides, as the wasting of one’s life was linked to the wasting of one’s wealth. We encounter Lano in \textit{Inferno} 13, where he is among the souls who Dante finds naked and scratched, running through the woods, being pursued by black hounds who eventually catch them and tear their bodies to pieces.

Dante never explicitly states in the \textit{Comedy} that Lano belonged to this spendthrift brigade; however, his placement of Lano in the Wood of the Suicides for the sin of prodigality necessitates that he knew what Lano’s sins were in life. It would make sense that news of a group of men who carried out their vices with such flair and drama in a town as close-by as Siena would make its way to Florence. What is even more certain is that the outcome of a battle between Siena and Arezzo would certainly be an important piece of news circulating in Florence, thus it is not surprising that Dante had heard about Pieve al Toppo. It is the only fact of Lano’s life that Dante explicitly cites in \textit{Inferno} 13: “E l’altro, cui pareva tardar troppo,/ gridava: ‘Lano, si non furo accorte/ le gambe tue a le giostre dal Toppo!’” (118-120). Dante seems to buy into the rumor that Lano chose to fight and be killed in the battle—i.e. his legs were not nimble—rather than run away and escape when it seemed the Sienese were going to lose to the Aretines. This was not out of bravery but sought as a solution to the ruin he had driven himself to from a life of wasteful spending. This also explains why Lano calls out, “Or accorri, accorri, morte!” (\textit{Inf.} 13.17). There is no doubt that the general news of the outcome of the battle would
travel to Florence via word of mouth, but why Dante would possess such specific information about one man’s performance and subsequent death in said battle is unusual. It will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Moving forward chronologically, the next newsworthy event that appears in the Comedy is Guccio de’ Tarlati’s drowning in the Arno, which took place near Arezzo. Guccio is our first character not to appear in Hell; instead, he appears in Purgatorio 6 among the late repentant. Guccio is merely identified as the one who drowned while running either from or after someone: “… e l’altro ch’annegò correndo in caccia” (Purg. 6.15). He appears among a group of mostly Tuscan victims of clan warfare, which sets up Dante’s invective against civil strife in the second half of this canto. His grouping among other confirmed victims of internecine conflict would suggest that Dante might have known that the reason for Guccio’s drowning was that he was either chasing the Bostoli family or was being pursued by them. However, Dante does not explicitly cite the Bostoli family as the cause of Guccio’s death. Dante also does not mention Guccio by name; only the early commentators give his name. Guccio’s sin—being a late repentant—is also a bit nebulous and one wonders if Dante knew anything of this man’s life besides the fact that he died suddenly, and thus was not given a chance to atone for his sins. It is possible that Dante himself did not remember Guccio’s full name, but remembered the freak accident in the Arno where a man’s horse ran away from him, causing him to drown. That sole newsworthy event, coupled with the understanding that this man was either in pursuit of or in flight from (in caccia is unclear on which) a warring family as well as the fact that he died before 1300, was all Dante needed to include him in this section of the Purgatorio. The minute details of his sins in life, his name, why he was running, who was
chasing him/who he was chasing, are not necessary to remember. Thus, this bit of news is probably one of the most convincing so far to stem from solely oral tradition.

The next event is one of the most talked-about in all of the Divine Comedy: Ugolino della Gherardesca’s confinement in 1288 to the Torre dei Gualandi in Pisa with his two sons and two grandsons, all of whom died of starvation. The news of this scandal must have been pervasive in medieval Tuscany, for it is the only current event in this chapter that Dante presents in dramatic detail, detail that could not simply have come to him via town gossip. The layers of this episode are obviously complex, but for the purposes of this chapter, we will only explore the facts Dante explicitly cites in his cantos. It is important to note, however, that Dante takes the facts he possesses and lets his imagination run wild with them. Examples of this include his conversion of Ugolino’s adult sons and adolescent grandsons into four helpless children, his invention of Ugolino’s fever dream, and his detailed narration of what unfolded inside the tower, which only the five victims could ever know.\footnote{407}

The facts of the incident are bountiful, as Ugolino’s story consumes all of Inferno 33. An attempt will be made to weed out what is Dantean invention and what are the actual facts he learned about Ugolino’s story. The first piece of information Dante knew about Ugolino was how Ugolino had sinned. We find Ugolino in Antenora among the betrayers of party. Ugolino carried out a rather interesting political career in which he flip-flopped between Guelph and Ghibelline parties, depending on which was more

\footnote{407 It must be noted that Dante is not alone in calling all of Ugolino’s sons and grandsons “figliuoli,” or rather making them all a young age. Both the Cronica di Pisa (col. 979C) and Francesco da Buti’s lectures on Dante in Pisa in 1385 transform them all into children. There is also an inconsistency on the part of the early commentators on this matter. In reality, Uguiccione and Gaddo were Ugolino’s sons and both of adult age, while Anselmuccio and his brother Nino il Brigata were probably around 15 and were Ugolino’s grandsons, the children of Ugolino’s eldest son, Guelfo.}
advantageous for him or for Pisa. Ugolino was born to a Ghibelline family, joined the Guelph side in 1275 to advance his political aspirations, then switched back to the Ghibelline party when he conspired with Archbishop Ruggieri (his companion in Hell) against his grandson Nino Visconti, who was a Guelph. While Ugolino is accused by Ruggieri of betraying the Ghibelline party by attempting to sell castles in the outskirts of Pisa to the Florentines and Lucchesi, this is not the sin Dante condemns him for. It is mentioned in verse 86, but Dante seems to think it was mere accusation. The party Dante accuses Ugolino of betraying is in fact the Guelph party, the party that entrusted him with the rule of the city.

The next set of facts Dante presents us with is what unfolded between Ugolino and Ruggieri. Ugolino says, “Che per l’effetto de’ suo’ mai pensieri,/ fidandomi di lui, io fossi preso/ e poscia morto, dir non è mestieri;/ però quel che non puoi aver inteso,/ cioè come la morte mia fu cruda,/ udirai, e saprai s’e’ m’ha offeso.” (Inf. 33.16-21). What is interesting in that statement is that Ugolino seems to make a stark transition between the news that must have traveled to Dante and the more intimate details of what really happened—i.e. Ugolino’s insider information. The first category contains things Dante poet “heard” from other people, while the second contains things Dante pilgrim “will hear” from Ugolino, the eyewitness. The first category is factual, secondhand information obtained by Dante in real life, while the second category is artistic invention carried out in his poem. In sum, the facts that Dante heard were that Ugolino trusted Ruggieri but Ruggieri betrayed him; Ruggieri took Ugolino and ultimately killed him.

Ugolino continues his story, and this is where it becomes more difficult to extract the facts from Dante’s artistic invention. Ugolino moves on to describe his dream of the
wolf cubs, and within it we do get one piece of factual information: the first mention of Pisa by name. Ugolino describes the scene inside the tower, how his sons cried in their sleep and begged for bread, which is most likely a product of Dante’s imagination, as no other source material pre-dating Dante for what unfolded inside the tower has been located. But Ugolino does perhaps give us one bit of factual information when he says, “… e io senti’ chiavar l’uscio di sotto/ a l’orribile torre…” (Inf. 33.46-47). So Dante locates them within a tower and states that they were locked up there. We get the first naming of a son in line 50, Anselmuccio. But what Anselmuccio says to his father, entreating him to eat their flesh to curb his hunger, is again Dantine invention. We do get a sense of a general passage of time here, which does have factual basis. Ugolino’s next child, Gaddo, is named in line 68. It is unclear if what follows next is Dantine invention or not. Dante states that Gaddo dies first and then the following three sons died one by one between the fifth and sixth day. This could have been something Dante learned secondhand, as the starvation process could come to a completion within five to six days, or it could be him merely guessing. Ugolino then states in lines 74-75 that he spent two days calling after them after they had died, which would imply that it took him two days longer to starve to death. Again, this could have been a fact Dante learned secondhand, or one that he devised himself. Dante pilgrim then goes on a tirade against Pisa, and in it he reports the information about Ugolino’s alleged crime for which he was locked up: “Che se ‘l conte Ugolino aveva voce/ d’aver tradita te de le castella,/ non dovei tu i figliuoli porre a tal croce” (Inf. 33.85-87). Finally, in line 89, Dante names Ugolino’s remaining two children: Uguiccione and Brigata.
In summary, the facts Dante most likely learned of secondhand are: Ugolino’s name, that it was Archbishop Ruggieri who betrayed Ugolino and locked him up, the location of Pisa, that Ugolino’s imprisonment was in a tower, that he was locked up with four sons, that the sons are named Anselmuccio, Gaddo, Uguiccione and Brigata,\(^{408}\) that Gaddo died first and then the others died between days five and six,\(^{409}\) that Ugolino lived for at least another two days after that, that the crime Ugolino was locked up for was the attempt to sell the castles, and that the prisoners were starved to death.\(^{410}\) The breadth of information contained in this story is such that it would most certainly require at least one written source used as a reference, as the details are a bit too intricate to keep stored in one’s memory, especially the names of each of the children, although it has been suggested that Dante could have received all of his information orally from Ugolino’s surviving grandson, Nino Visconti. If that were the case, Dante most certainly would have had to write down what Nino said. Some of the potential written sources Dante would have referenced while writing his canto on Ugolino will be discussed later in this chapter.

Our next newsworthy event took place some time around 1290: the hanging of the corrupt Sardinian judge Friar Gomita. Gomita had been appointed chancellor or deputy of Gallura,\(^{411}\) one of four administrative districts of Sardinia, by Nino Visconti. He was suspected of selling public offices, but Visconti did not convict him until he discovered that Gomita had arranged for the escape of certain prisoners under his watch. We find

\(^{408}\) Brigata is actually a nickname of Ugolino’s grandson Nino; one could assume Dante knew both his name and his nickname.

\(^{409}\) We know that they were all imprisoned in July 1288 and probably died in March 1289. At what point their food began being withheld is unclear.

\(^{410}\) The ending of this canto, specifically the line “Poscia, piu che ‘l dolor, poté ‘l digiuno” (line 75), is left open to interpretation. Whether Dante had heard that Ugolino ate the bodies of his children will always remain a mystery.

\(^{411}\) His official title is unclear.
Gomita in the fifth bolgia of Hell, among the barraters, and are given a pretty detailed description of his crimes. When we first hear of him, Virgil is asking if any of the sinners are Italian and is told that one of them is from “near there” (“fu di là vicino”, line 67).

The facts that had to travel first from Sardinia to Pisa and then from Pisa to Florence are spelled out very clearly in Inferno 22. First, we get his name, followed by where he’s from, and a list of his sins. “‘Fu frate Gomita,/ quel di Gallura, valse d’ogne froda,/ ch’ebbe i nemici di suo donno in mano,/ e fè si lor che ciascun se no loda:/ danar si tolse e lascioli di piano,/ si come e’ dice’; e ne li altri offici anche/ barrattier fu non picciol, ma sovrano./ Usa con esso donno Michel Zanche/ di Logodoro; e a dir di Sardigna/ le lingue lor non si sentono stanche.” (Inf. 22.81-90). We’re given the name frate Gomita, that he was from Gallura, that he treated his master’s enemies favorably, taking their money and letting them go free, and that he traded in the sale of Church appointments, given his place among the barraters. However, Dante doesn’t name Friar Gomita’s “master” (“donno”), but given that there’s strong evidence Dante knew Nino Visconti personally, one can assume he also knew precisely whom Friar Gomita betrayed. His pairing with Michele Zanche means that Dante probably also knew that Visconti appointed Zanche in Gomita’s place after he had him hanged.

Moving chronologically forward, after Gomita, we get one of the greatest heists in Medieval Italy: Vanni Fucci’s attempted robbery of two silver tablets from the chapel of San Iacopo in the church of San Zeno in Pistoia, which took place in 1293. Fucci, a

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412 The only surviving piece of evidence that implicates Fucci in the famous theft is found in a book of miracles, comprising the years 1293 to 1393, found in the Archivio Comune di Pistoia. What follows is the complete text: “[13 Marzii 1295] Vannesa fucci della dolce vanesse della monna et vanes mironne pistorienses cives nephandi et homines male conversationis et vite e tractaverunt inter se deliberation habita et instigation diabolicum thesaurum beati Iacobi de causis et enormitabus multi et aliqui fuerunt male infamati et inculpat inter quos erat Rampinus filius domini Ranucci de Forensibus porte Guidonis et sanna correagiarib. et puccius grassius vectariab. fuerunt agguati per multa genera
member of the white Cancellieri faction of Pistoia and one of the most notorious thieves of his age, is placed in the seventh bolgia among the thieves. He is one of the many souls whose body metamorphoses into a snake, turns to ash and then reconstitutes and begins anew. However, Fucci was a very violent man, known for at least one murder, that of Bertino de’ Vergiolesi, but he is not placed in the seventh circle with the violent. Dante pilgrim notes this confusion when he says, “… e domanda che colpa qua giù ‘l pinse;/ ch’io ‘l vidi omo di sangue e di crucci.” (Inf. 24.28-29). It seems his theft from San Zeno was far too notorious for Dante poet not to make that his principal sin.

Besides knowing about Fucci’s other, more violent crimes, Dante is well informed on the heist itself. The facts about himself that Fucci presents to us in Inferno 24 are as follows: that he was from Tuscany, that he lived a bestial life, and that he was from Pistoia. He then moves into the details of his famous robbery. “… Io non posso negar quel che tu chiedi:/ in giù son messo tanto perch’ io fui/ ladro a la sagrestia d’i belli arredi,/ e falsamente già fu apposto altrui,” (Inf. 24.36-39). We do not hear that Fucci stole two silver tablets specifically but just beautiful things from the sacristy; this could be because Dante wasn’t well informed about what was taken or because that expression made a better fit poetically. We also learn that it was falsely blamed on others. San Zeno is not named, nor is the chapel of San Iacopo. At most, it is implied that this robbery took place in Pistoia. None of his accomplices, nor the fact that he had accomplices, is mentioned. In reality, Rampino di Francesco Foresi was the one falsely held for the

 tormentorum… Orationibus factis (?) ex parte et pro parte ipsius Et vanes della monna predefectus ex dicto predicto fuit captus in sacra septa majoris ecclesie quadam die prima quadragesima tunc temporis (?) et in fortia protestatis videlicet Giana della bella d’ florentia et communis pistori qui nominavit malefactors qui ad dictum furtum consenserunt et facere intendebant except filio dicti domini Ranucci excusando eundem quod inculpabilis fuerat de peccatis dictis unde gratia dei et virginis exiterat liberatus.” Archivio Comune di Pistoia, Stanza IX, Tesoretto, Opera di S. Iacopo, c. 39r. For more, see Bacci, Peleo. Dante e Vanni Fucci secondo una tradizione ignota. Pistoia, Tip. Ed. Del Popolo Pistoiese, 1892.
crime, and it was only when one of Fucci’s accomplices, Vanni della Monna, was substituted for Rampino, that he was set free. But if Dante knew any of this more specific information, he does not let on. Dante pilgrim also does not act as if he knows Fucci personally, even though others have suggested they might have met when they both served as soldiers of Florence in the war against Pisa (1289-93), before the crime took place.

The following character is among one of the most talked-about in all of the Comedy, and yet relatively little is actually known about her: la Pia. Almost everything we claim to know about Pia, even the fact that we refer to her as Pia de’ Tolomei, in fact comes from the early commentators. Some commentators said that Pia was a Tolomei by marriage, that she first married Ildobrandino de’ Tolomei and later married a minor lord, Nello Pannochieschi, who killed her. Other commentators, though, such as the Anonimo fiorentino and Benvenuto da Imola, state that she was a Tolomei herself. It is from them that we get 1295 as the date of her death. According to some commentators, Nello killed Pia because of her infidelity; according to others, so he could remarry. There is a wealth of misinformation about Pia, and much scholarship has been devoted to

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413 Girolamo Gigli was the first to identify Pia as Pia Guastelloni, widow in 1290 of Baldo d’Aldobrandino Tolomei. But a document found in the Archivio di Stato di Siena and published by Alessandro Lisini proved Pia was not Pia Guastelloni, as Pia Guastelloni was still alive in 1318. See Nuovo documento della Pia de’ Tolomei figlia di Buonincontro Guastelloni. Siena, Lazzeri, 1893.

414 Pietro di Dante and Benvenuto da Imola identify Nello as Nello Pannocchieschi, but through the years two different Nellos were identified as Pia’s husband: Nello d’Inghiramo Pannocchieschi and Nello di Mangiante Pannocchieschi. Nello di Mangiante, however, was never married to a Pia. Much legend has been attributed to Nello d’Inghiramo, on the other hand, who would go on to enjoy an affair with the countess Margherita da Pitigliano and may have even married her in secret. They had a child together, Bindoccio, who died in 1300; Margherita’s and Nello’s names appear on his tombstone in the church of S. Francesco di Massa Marittima. See Maggini, F. “Review of R. Davidsohn, Forschungen Zu Älteren Geschichte Von Florenz (4 Vols.), 1896-1908.” Bullettino della società Dantesca Italiana, N.S. vol. 17, 1910, pp. 120-130 for more information on the love affair and the hypothesis that Nello killed Pia to be with the countess.

solving the mystery of Pia’s life, but none of that is very important to our study. What we care about is what Dante knew, and in order to ascertain that, all we can rely on is the poem itself.

Dante’s poem, in fact, doesn’t mention any family names at all. Dante does not identify Pia as a Tolomei. He does not identify her husband in any way. The only facts contained in the poem are the following: her name was Pia, she was born in Siena, she died in Maremma, she was married, and it was most likely her husband who killed her. We must say most likely because Dante’s verses are merely suggestive: “… salso colui ch ‘nnanellata pria dispose m’avea con la sua gemma” (Purg. 5.135-136). We do not really know what Pia’s sins in life were; we only know that Dante places her among the souls violently killed and late repentant. Therefore, the most “newsworthy” event about her was probably her manner of death. It must have been scandalous in some way for the news to travel to Florence and for Dante to hear about it. This may give credence to Benvenuto’s claim that she was thrown from a window: “One day, while they were dining and she stood for a time at a window of the palace with her maid servants, a servant, at Nello’s bidding, took her by the feet and threw her out of the window, and she died on striking the ground…” This story surely would have gotten people talking. One can still visit the spot where she was thrown, as it has become known as the Salto della Contessa.417

Our final character involved in a newsworthy event shares more in common with Pia than one might assume at first glance. His inclusion in the Comedy seems to stem

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416 Much has been made about this vague use of the word “pria.” Does it mean Pia was married once before? Does it mean she was engaged to someone else before her husband stole her away? See Rossi, Pietro. “Dante e Siena.” 80-85.
directly from the gruesome manner in which he died, which is really the only tangible evidence for why Dante would include Pia in the Comedy as well. We will speak now of Benincasa d’Arezzo (or da Laterina), an Aretine judge who was murdered by the highwayman Ghino di Tacco. We find Benincasa on the same terrace of Purgatory as Pia, among the late repentant. This choice of location is perhaps indicative of the fact that Dante knew nothing of Benincasa’s sins or how he lived his life. What was noteworthy about him, enough for word to travel to Florence from Rome, was how he died.

Benincasa was a judge who had previously sentenced a relative of Ghino di Tacco’s to death when he was acting as assessor for the podestà of Siena. In revenge, Ghino beheaded Benincasa while he was sitting on the bench in the papal audit office in Rome, sometime around 1297.

In fact, Dante does not mention any other facts about Benincasa aside from the manner in which he was murdered. “Quiv’era l’Aretin che da le braccia/ fiere di Ghin di Tacco ebbe la morte,” (Purg. 6.13-14). In sum, all Dante seems to have known about Benincasa is that he was from Arezzo (or near it) and Ghino di Tacco murdered him. We don’t learn that he was a judge, or that the murder occurred in Rome, or that he was beheaded, or that Ghino was acting in revenge. Most likely, Dante had heard that it occurred in Rome and that it was a savage beheading while on the job, because without these details, it simply is not very interesting. However, they were not seen as necessary details to include in his poem.

Now that we have established the wealth of newsworthy information that made its way to Dante, it is now necessary to establish exactly how news was disseminated in Medieval Italy. Unfortunately, the existing scholarship for the Middle Ages is scattered
and incomplete at best. If we move just a couple hundred years into the future, however, we get a much clearer picture from the quality scholarship that has been conducted on the Renaissance. An excellent study on how diplomatic networks and letter writing played into the dissemination of news can be found in Isabella Lazzarini’s “News from Mantua.” In it, she studies the dispatches sent between Ferrara, Milan, Venice and Florence concerning the dealings of Maximilian of Habsburg and Francesco Gonzaga between 1492 and 1499. But one of the best case studies done on how the news of a single event spread throughout Italy was done by Margaret Meserve in her article “News from Negroponte.” In it she tracks the spread of information from the day Negroponte (on the island of Euboea, a colony of Venice) fell to the Turks in 1470, which just so happened to coincide with the beginnings of the printing industry. Meserve counts more than a dozen texts published in the months after the colony’s fall that record the event in print: everything from eyewitness reports, poetic laments, humanist orations, theological ruminations and popular sermons. Meserve stresses that these publications did not “break” the news to the Italian public but rather “offered analysis and commentary to an already well-informed readership.” One of the most valuable pieces of information to come from Meserve’s study is how long it took for the news to travel. A shipwrecked sailor with a damp pile of letters arrived in Venice 19 days after the colony fell. To put that distance into perspective, he had to travel from an island near present-day Athens, Greece, up the Adriatic Sea to the northeastern corner of Italy, to Venice. Scarce

information exists for how long it took to travel between cities within Italy, so Meserve’s precise news travel time for the 1470 event is quite valuable. She says that the news left Venice and reached Ferrara on the same day, July 31. It arrived in Rome on August 4, in Milan August 5, and in Naples August 9. We know that several years after the fall of Negroponte, when Galeazzo Maria Sforza was assassinated on December 26, 1476, the news reached Venice from Milan in just two days, on December 28 and Florence in three days, on December 29. But earlier than the late 1400s, the travel time is unclear. John Hyde reports that a scarsella postal service existed in Italy in the 14th century that had a transit time of about a month, faster in the summer months.421

Meserve’s research is incredibly valuable for one other reason: it proves that Italy was unique in its thirst for news. The fact that so many texts dealing with the fall of Negroponte went into print at all suggests that there already existed an audience eager to consume the information. “The printers of these texts, far from inaugurating a media revolution, seem to have responded to the demands of an existing market for news and information.”422 A sophisticated and informed urban reading public, one who was politically engaged and civic minded, existed in Italy long before the arrival of print, and Florence seems to have been the greatest news center of all. It should be no surprise then that the word gazette is actually Italian in origin—a gazeta was a Venetian coin and is how much a news sheet originally sold for. Meserve attributes to this existing market the fact that the practice of using press to disseminate news and commentary on recent events was adopted at the very moment the new technology was put to use.423

422 Meserve “News from Negroponte,” 445.
423 Ibid, 443.
Journalistic publications as we know them today did not have their start in Italy until the 17th century. The first newsletters, or coranti, arrived in Florence some time between 1636 and 1641, bringing reports of the latest events in and outside of Italy. The forerunner to the proper newsletter was the almanac, which flourished in the print revolution of the 15th century. Almanacs contained information about the future, such as weather predictions and dates of religious holidays, things of immediate use to people’s domestic lives and thus related to the function of a newspaper. In the beginning, there existed both print and manuscript versions of newsletters. Due to the difficult nature of producing them, manuscript newsletters obviously cost more and had a smaller readership, though they tended to be more complete in the information they contained. Printed newsletters, on the other hand, were widely available and often read aloud to reach an even larger audience. They were usually distributed every week or every two weeks and contained brief reports from different cities—the further the news had to travel, the less timely it tended to be. There were large networks of menanti, news writers, set up around Italy passing information to each other.

The most comprehensive study done on the early stages of journalism in Italy, especially on how it relates to the field of astrology, can be found in Eileen Reeves’ *Evening News: Optics, Astronomy and Journalism in Early Modern Europe.* In it, Reeves identifies two other types of news dissemination of the 17th century: the newsletters of Jesuit missionaries and satirical poems that were attached to the statutes of Pasquino and Marforio in Rome. Reeves also discusses the problem of rumors and fake

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news in the early 17th century, as men who disseminated false or inappropriate information about current events were often put to death.\textsuperscript{425}

Of course, this is all far too late to apply to Dante’s age. While the specific ways in which news was circulated throughout Italy in the Middle Ages are more piecemeal, we are able to ascertain to a certain extent how Dante may have learned about current events happening in other cities outside of Florence. The most obvious mode of transmission and the most difficult to study would be that of gossip or oral transmission. Because of its ephemeral nature, we can only find traces of what was being transmitted orally in surviving written texts—including Dante’s. When Dante says things in the \textit{Comedy} like “… se Tosco se’, ben sai omai chi fu” (\textit{Inf.} 32.66), as is said of Sassolo Mascheroni, he is referring to something so scandalous it got all of the citizens of Florence talking. In this case, a man being rolled through the city streets in a barrel full of nails would certainly be the type of event to draw the attention of Florentine citizens.

But there are more tangible ways still in which news was disseminated, ways we are actually able to study because they leave a written trace. We can find reports on current events in a myriad of texts—penitential sermons, vernacular ballads, saints’ lives, travelers’ diaries, humanist orations. But perhaps the most pervasive way news was disseminated was through private correspondence, or letter writing. An enormous amount of information circulated via private letters, reports and ambassadorial dispatches. Most of this news was political or diplomatic in nature, the kind of information that would have an effect on civic life in some way. One of the most well established networks was the diplomatic network. Permanent consulates had been set up before the Crusade, and,

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid, 15.
especially for maritime cities like Venice who had dependent territories elsewhere, the establishment of a permanent communications network was an essential. Dante himself was on a diplomatic mission when he was exiled from Florence gathering important information. These dispatches and reports, however, tend not to survive, because their value was considered short-term and transitory. Any ambassadors’ correspondence that survived through the centuries is due to private initiative rather than state bureaucracy.

As mentioned before, Lazzarini’s study on diplomatic networks in 15th-century Italy, though a later period, is some of the best scholarship available on ambassadorial reports. Lazzarini studied the inner circle of ambassadors in Milan, Venice and Rome as well as envoys from France and Spain who exchanged news, analyzed the political situation and influenced decisions. She focused on the Gonzaga envoys and ambassadors in Milan and Venice and found that they relied heavily on other diplomatic networks rather than a direct channel with authorities. These envoys would synthesize the news they attained from princes and government officials as well as secret informers into written texts that contained news, hypotheses and arguments. She found that these reports also tended to be very dramatic or theatrical in their level of detail. “If in the 1450s the diplomatic dispatches were mostly keen to present politics and human relationships in an argumentative language as events that could fit in a general and predictable pattern, at the end of the century the emotions spilled out of the story… in a more theatrical representation of feelings.”

As for the Middle Ages, the most comprehensive study of private correspondence is most certainly John Hyde’s Literacy and its Uses: Studies on Late Medieval Italy. Hyde studied in the archive of the Crown of Aragona, which contains 15,000-16,000

incoming letters from the reign of Jayme II (1291-1327). Jayme II had many informers, including Mario Mariglion in Venice and Geri Spini and Orlando Marini in Florence. But his most active envoy was Cristiano Spinola, who wrote him at least 29 letters between 1300 and 1326, transmitting news from his native Genoa as well as other parts of Italy. In times of crisis Spinola would increase his number of letters to the king, including any information that was of political significance from a wide range of sources. Spinola’s letters cover events of great significance to Dante’s life, including the Florentine revolution of 1308 and Henry VII’s descent into Italy.  

Hyde also studied letters sent to Luigi Gonzaga from Cristoforo da Piacenza, who had set up residence close to the papal curia. It was a common practice by many European sovereigns to send permanent representatives, though not ambassadors (residents were not usually called ambassadors before about 1500), to reside in Rome to stay informed on what was happening inside the papal curia. Cristoforo would report news relating to rumors and preoccupations within the curia, like the outbreak of the schism, but what Hyde found fascinating is how often Cristoforo would report items not relating to his mission that he somehow judged to be of interest to his government. Hyde also found that these messengers were expected to work more or less around the clock, so their newsgathering would continue even when it had little do with their specific mission.  

Hyde also found that Villani seems to have pulled a significant portion of his information for the Nuova cronica from the medium of letters. Villani’s news from outside of Italy is drawn most heavily from areas where Florentine merchants were very...
active, like Flanders, England, France and Spain, and his information tends to be quite detailed, which would suggest he was pulling it from merchant letters.\textsuperscript{429}

Hyde not only studied letters but also chronicles, like Villani’s, which seem to have drawn heavily from information derived from the diplomatic and merchant networks. He says that sometimes the influence of letter writing was so strong as to transform the format of the chronicle, either so that instead of being arranged chronologically, it was arranged according to when the news reached a particular place or to the extent that the focus was not so much on the events themselves but rather on how the information became known to the author. Hyde calls them “news chronicles.” He studies two of them: one an anonymous chronicle compiled between 1363 and 1388, the other the Morosini chronicle of the early 15\textsuperscript{th} century. Both postdate Dante, but not by much. The anonymous chronicle carefully notes the day on which each piece of news reached him—crimes, prophecies, popular verses. His sources of information include merchants’ letters and diplomatic communications, some of which were read aloud, but he doesn’t always name his sources. The Morosini chronicle, however, contains precise detail on where each piece of information came from. Hyde believes this is because of a concern for accuracy and authenticity, carried over from the common concern in merchant correspondence, in which misinformation could mean financial loss. What Hyde finds important about the Morosini chronicle is the fact that Morosini did not belong to the inner circles of the government or a major commercial organization, and yet he was so well informed on the news—much like Dante. Hyde says the chronicle is a testament to the fact that governments and wealthy individuals (who could afford messengers) did not keep all of the information to themselves, thus making news in short...

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid, 244.
supply. On the contrary, a typical citizen of the 14th and 15th centuries, was very well informed. Morosini knew about events in Rome, Bologna, Cadiz, the English Channel and Salerno.

The next mode of transmission for news in Medieval Italy would have been the very genre Dante was writing himself: vernacular poetry. Duecento poets tended to be civic-minded and politically engaged, and thus their poems tended to respond directly to the current events of their time. Vernacular poetry also had the unique capability to be both a written and oral genre, which allowed for its wide diffusion across all audiences, including those who were illiterate. This is not dissimilar to the newsletters of the 17th century that we just discussed, which were read aloud to passersby who did not pay for subscriptions. The aural propagation of news also played a large part in the time period of the fall of Negroponte—two poetic lamenti, vernacular ballads describing the siege of the city, were printed in five different editions in the decade following the event.430 The tradition of singing or reciting ballads and poems to live audiences dates back to Dante’s time.431 Florentines especially were accustomed to hearing entertainers sing topical ballads, including news of war and politics. They would gather in the piazza outside the church of San Martino del Vescovo to watch these semi-theatrical performances of poetic texts, as there was a consistent interest in and demand for political texts.

The man responsible for the recitation was alternately called many names: cantastorie, canterino, cantore, cantatore, cantimpanca (or cantimbanca), buffone,

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430 Meserve “News from Negroponte,” 454.
confortino, ioculatore, giullare, histrione, lusor, recitans vulgaria, portitor sonetti. These terms can be confusing, and there are subtle differences between them. A buffone, confortino, giullare, ioculatore or histrione prior to the 14th century all seemed to have described any sort of poet-singer or entertainer, though later on those names became more associated with a sort of minstrel, street singers who entertained crowds often in combination with juggling or dancing and the sale of trinkets and remedies; buffone, however, would go on to be the term used for the official position of the civic herald. Cantimpanca, canterino and cantastorie (as well as the more generic cantore) typically apply to people who only sang vernacular poetry. The panca of the cantimpanca refers to the platform or bench that the singer would stand on. It seems the term canterino might best suit our purposes, as it was a more specific and often-used term to refer only to those who sang lyric and epic verses, not only in the piazzas but also in the palazzi. In the De Vulgari Eloquentia, Dante uses the term prolatore to refer to this profession: “…et etiam talia verba in cartulis absque prolatore iacentia cantiones vocamus” […] and we even call canzoni such words lying on sheets of paper and lacking someone to recite them. We would translate prolatore here to more of a reciter, one whose profession was similar to a cantore but for whom the poetic component played a much larger role.

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434 2.7; Italics my own.
What is remarkable about the profession is the sheer volume of texts the canterini were expected to memorize. They would recite racconti cavallereschi, legends, novelle, political or historical poems, lamenti, sometimes entire speeches. They were exposed to vast bodies of literary material and were also expected to improvise upon the poetry they recited in a living, inventive way. Blake Wilson likens this body of knowledge to a sort of musical zibaldone of the mind, much like the paper scrapbooks that would contain many texts from diverse literary genres. Wilson says the canterini most likely employed memory techniques like placing key words and images in different “rooms” of imagined memory “houses,” so that each speech, poem and story could be retrieved at one’s will.\footnote{Wilson, 167.}

Several remarkable examples of vernacular poetry that would have been recited to an audience and that contain newsworthy information have come down to us. An example that postdates Dante but is valuable nonetheless is Se la mia mente, frate mio, non falla by Gidino da Sommacampagna, which discusses the progression of the French army into Italy in 1384.\footnote{Ghidino da Sommacampagna. Sonetti inediti. Ed. B. Sorio, Verona, Merlo, 1858.} Se la mia mente is an example of a contrasto, in which two interlocutors sing against each other on a chosen theme. This particular theme involved deciding which route the army was going to take and which Italian city-states would cooperate and which would rebel. Elena Abramov-van Rijk, in her article on reciting verse, describes the piece as “a kind of ‘political talk-show,’ a performance by two ‘political analysts’ who sometimes argue with each other and sometimes agree; neither offers any guarantee for the accuracy of the forecast.”\footnote{Abramov-van Rijk, Elena. Parlar Cantando: The Practice of Reciting Verses in Italy from 1300 to 1600. Bern; New York, Peter Lang, 2009, p. 25.} Passersby in the piazza listening to this contrasto would have been treated to a broadcast not unlike political TV shows of
the modern age, like CNN’s Crossfire. The problem with these texts, and why the survival of Se la mia mente is so valuable, is that they were of intense interest on the day of their transmission and then failed to be relevant thereafter. Abramov-van Rijk likens it to an old newspaper and says that’s why most works like this have not been preserved.\footnote{Ibid, 25.} These oral performance pieces tended to be lost to time not only because they became irrelevant the day after their transmission, like Se la mia mente, but also for two other reasons: 1) the assumed illiteracy associated with them encouraged the judgment that they were not serious texts worthy of study and 2) the canterini who delivered them were very easy to come by, not elite like “real” authors. Unfortunately, relying on what remains of the written record makes reconstructing the oral transmission nearly impossible. That is why a text like Se la mia mente is so valuable, even though it post-dates Dante and was therefore not a possible source of his. There were probably many poems like Se la mia mente that were contemporary to Dante that have been lost to time or thrown away for their irrelevance.\footnote{Oral poems that were extremely detailed and able to catch the imagination of the popular audience did tend to survive, however. See for example La Chanson de Roland and The Song of the Nibelungs.}

I would like to discuss two texts intended for oral recitation that are contemporary to Dante, but both of which (either because of the location they would have been recited in or the year in which they were composed) Dante probably never heard read aloud. However, he could have read them in their written versions. That means they would fall in line more with the written texts we examined in the first two chapters, but at the time of their recitation they most certainly would have been used for the transmission of up-to-date, relevant news. The first set of sources is two incomplete Romagnole compositions
of the 1280s (or possibly 1270s).\textsuperscript{440} They discuss the turbulent communal warfare between the Guelphs and Ghibellines in the Romagna region, in particular the feuds between the Lambertazzi and Geremei and the betrayal of Tebaldello Zambrasi, who betrayed his Ghibelline-aligned city when he opened the city gates of Faenza to the Geremei, who were Guelphs. They slaughtered the Lambertazzi, who were taking refuge there as a result.\textsuperscript{441} These poems would have given Dante all the background information he needed on the political strife of the Romagna area.

The next group of compositions is a series of \textit{tenzoni} that consists of 17 sonnets composed by Monte Andrea in conjunction with Cione, Beroardo, Federigo Gualterotti, Chiaro D’Avanzati and Lambertuccio Frescobaldo about the military campaign of Charles of Anjou against Conradin in 1267-1269, as well as two other \textit{tenzoni} strictly between Monte Andrea and Schiatta Pallavillani on the same subject.\textsuperscript{442} I believe the \textit{tenzoni} with Schiatta best elucidate both Abramov-van Rijk’s idea of a political talk show of sorts—one that is actually contemporary to Dante’s time—as well as the way in which these vernacular poems were both responding to and propagating the most up-to-date news. The political implications of \textit{tenzone} 73 [1-2] are set up from the start, the two interlocutors taking fiercely partisan stands—Monte a Guelph; Schiatta a Ghibelline. From Monte and Schiatta we get a sort of political commentary on current events, specifically the recent election of Conradin by the German princes in 1267. They take fierce jabs at each other’s political views and each proclaims that their side will be the victor. Note when Schiatta says all of Italy will be under the Empire’s rule soon: “Tu erri


\textsuperscript{441} “ch’aprì Faenza quando si dormia” (\textit{Inf.} 32.123).

troppo, ché qui (nonn- “a fòrso”!) fia de lo ‘mpero or tutta la campangna.” Or when Monte taunts Schiatta’s great leader, Conradin, calling him a little lamb whose bite doesn’t break the skin: “Ma chi vuoi che tema ‘l’Agnello’? Il suo morso non fa sanguinare!” They exchange insults about each other’s parties, about the outcomes of previous battles (see Manfred at Benevento), about Charles of Anjou and Conradin and who will come out the victor.

One of the more interesting moments between Monte and Schiatta comes in the following tenzone (74), in which things have progressed further between Conradin and Charles of Anjou. Schiatta mocks Monte’s nickname for Conradin “l’Agnello” (a reference to his young age) when he says, “Que’ che fue detto Angnel, chi n’avrà morso, in ongne parte pena il fer e sangna; perché vede, mò, che llui à messo ad ors’, o[h]! Contro ad ogn’altro, fia sua Potenza stangna.” What is worth noting is when Schiatta says “perché vede, mò, che llui à messo ad ors’, o[h]!,” which in modern Italian would translate to “Abbiamo appena visto che ha preso il sopravvento.” They just saw how Conradin got the upper hand, which is probably a reference to Conradin’s victory at Ponte a Valle in 1268. This shows how the authors are up-to-date on their information. They are actively keeping abreast of the news, and by writing it into their tenzoni, are also actively transmitting the news to passersby who might come listen to them. There is an equally impressive moment in the longer tenzone (97), in the portion where Gualterotti is responding to Monte. Gualterotti writes, “Sentenza, [‘n] rima tua, nonn-ag[g]io colta, perch’e’, per certo, or l’aquil’à colta.” He says that while they are speaking, the lion

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444 Ibid.
445 Ibid, 221.
446 Ibid, 250.
has grasped the eagle (i.e. Charles of Anjou has defeated Conradin, the Empire). This gives the impression that events are unfolding even as they are speaking about what has just happened prior. They are keeping their ears alert to any news that might change the course of their tenzone, and of course acting as sources for news themselves.

One last source for the transmission of news in Medieval Italy, one that was surely utilized by Dante, were the pitture infamanti, which were portraits of criminals that were painted on the outside walls of government buildings (like the Palazzo del Podestà or the Palazzo dei Priori in Florence) in order to shame the men depicted in them as publicly as possible. Crimes such as baratry, forgery, giving false testimony and betrayal were painted for all the citizens of the commune to see. This was not just a Florentine practice but spread to other parts of Tuscany as well. For example, on the outside wall of the parochial church of San Gimignano was a painting of Nanza Paltoni, who killed his brother Schiavo Paltoni, the head of the Guelph party. The practice seems to have originated in the late 13th century (Fino Tedaldi was commissioned in 1292 to paint pitture infamanti on the outside wall of the Camera del Comune in Florence) but continued to be used more heavily in the 14th and 15th centuries. The artist Andrea del Castagno, a 15th-century painter, earned the nickname Andrea degli Impiccati for the number of pitture infamanti he painted. It was important that the face of the person is recognizable, and in this way, the pitture infamanti probably served as an excellent basis for the development of the art of portraiture. Often the men being painted were exiles or people unknown in the city, who were still wanted for their crimes; sometimes they had

escaped and the only way to punish them was in effigy. Like diplomatic reports and oral traditions, these paintings were ephemeral. Being painted on outside walls subjected them to the forces of nature, and because their meaning was lost to future generations, they were generally destroyed as soon as they were no longer relevant. None of the *pitture infamanti* survive, even in reproduction.

However, there is one *pittura infamante* that we know was painted in a mural on the Palazzo del Podestà that Dante almost certainly would have seen. While we do not have a reproduction of it, we do have a written description. The Conti Guidi of Porciano, specifically Tancredo and Bandino, were convicted in 1283 by the commune of Florence for pillaging from a vendor from Ancona, in Florentine territory. The Florentines, however, did not have the power to prosecute them since they were not Florentine citizens, so the only thing they could do was paint their portraits on the outside wall of the Palazzo del Podestà. Dante lived nearby to the Palazzo del Podestà and probably would have passed by the mural very frequently. Robert Davidsohn believes that this mural was the inspiration for the following verses of the *Purgatorio* about the Conti Guidi of Porciano:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tra brutti porci più degni di galle} \\
\text{Che d’altro cibo fatto in uman uso} \\
\text{Dirizza prima il suo povero calle. (Purg. 14.43-45)}
\end{align*}
\]

All of the above-mentioned ways in which news traveled could have easily served as Dante’s sources for his real characters in the *Comedy*. However, just because the events selected for this chapter were happening during Dante’s lifetime, does not necessarily require that he learned about them in real time. After all, we have kept the

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events to before the year of Dante’s exile in 1302, where we can pinpoint his location with almost certainty to Florence, but Dante was not writing the *Inferno* until several years later, probably between the years 1304 and 1308. This means that as long as a written source was available to him before 1304-1308, he could have used it for the *Inferno*. For the *Purgatorio*, it could have been published even later than that. For this chapter, I consulted chronicles that were completed around the end of the 13th century, because all of the news events covered in this chapter occurred in 1280 or later. For example, Benincasa’s murder occurred in 1297, so Dante could not have learned about that from the anonymous *Gesta florentinorum*, which stopped covering events in 1270.

The first written source that we will discuss that Dante could have consulted is the *Chronicon* by Pietro Cantinelli, a Bolognese notary living in exile at Faenza. Cantinelli wrote the *Chronicon* about events in the Romagna between 1228 and 1306, especially in Bologna up until 1274 and then in Faenza thereafter. Cantinelli writes about one character pertinent to our study—Friar Alberigo—but many others who appear elsewhere in the *Comedy*. Francesco Torraca, the editor of the 1902 (and most recent) edition of the *Chronicon*, says this of the relevance of Cantinelli when studying Dante, “Non posso omettere che singolar pregio della cronaca è il grande aiuto, che porgo all’illustrazione storica della Divina Commedia, all’illustrazione, vorrei dire, più autentica; perché essa fu scritta negli anni della giovinezza di Dante, mentre vivevano gli uomini, e accadevano gli avvenimenti, che poi Dante avrebbe nominati o rappresentati, e ricordati.”

interesting about Torraca’s edition of the *Chronicon* is that it differs greatly from the Mittarelli edition of 1771 in its presentation of Friar Alberigo. The Torraca edition presents the murder much more matter-of-factly, only stating that it occurred at lunch and who was killed by whom.\(^\text{452}\) However, the Mittarelli edition includes the much more dramatic version in which the famous phrase of “bring on the fruits!” is included:

Die mercurii secunda maii interfecti cum gladiis in castro Cesatae, dicto la Castellina Manfredus cum Alberghetto de Manfredis ordinis Gaudentium in domo ipsius in convivio lautissimo per eum preparato, propter alapam datam a d. Alberghetto dicto fratri Alberico, cupiditate dominii, ab Ugolino et Francisco de Manfredis, praesente dicto fratre Alberico, dicente publice: –Venga le frutte.\(^\text{453}\)

It is unclear if perhaps the manuscripts used by Mittarelli were influenced by the *Comedy* or why Torraca felt that section was erroneous. Regardless, the Torraca edition would be enough to give Dante the basic facts of the murder, minus the dramatic moment of the arrival of the fruit.

The next four sources in which our Dantean characters from this chapter appear have already been spoken about previously in chapter 2. The first is the anonymous *Cronichetta* contained in the Magliab. XXV.505 manuscript.\(^\text{454}\) As mentioned before, the Magliab. XXV.505’s date of composition is unknown, but was most likely during the first 30 years of the 14\(^{\text{th}}\) century. Since the last date given is 1321, it is unclear if this

\(^{452}\) “Dictum anno, die mercurii secundo intrante madio, occisus fuit gladio Manfredus de Manfredis et Albergittus eius filius cum eo similiter; et ipso occiderunt Franciscus filius condam Albergitti de Manfredis et Ugolimus filius fratris Alberici de Manfredis in presentia dicti fratris Alberici, in castro Secate subitus Faventiam, in prandio, quod ibidem faciebant in domo et castro dicti Francisci, dum ipsi omnes veniebant a confinibus a civitate Ravenne, de licencia domini Guilielmii Durantis tunc comitis Romaniolae” (ibid, 54).


manuscript would have been circulating in any sort of redaction while Dante was still alive. However, it is worth mentioning that the manuscript briefly narrates the episode with Ugolino under the year 1288: “A di XII di marzo morì il conte Ugolino di Pisa e 2 suoi figliuoli e 2 nipoti di fame in Pisa.” The information here is sparse, though we do get an exact date of March 12, 1288 (though Ugolino actually died in March of 1289). We learn that along with Ugolino, his two sons and two grandsons died with him, that they died of hunger, and that it occurred in Pisa, though no tower or imprisonment is mentioned.

Ugolino’s story appears in three other contemporary chronicles: the Paolino Pieri chronicle, which was most likely written around 1302 and therefore would have aligned perfectly with Dante’s writing of the *Inferno*, the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle, which was also probably published around the turn of the 14th century, as it narrates events up until 1297 and codex XIII.F.16 at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli (from the beginning of the 14th century). Paolino Pieri writes this of Ugolino, also under the year 1288:

E in questo tempo li Pisani si levaro a romore a trassero a le case del conte Ugolino, e presero lui e due suoi figliuoli e due suoi nepoti, cioè figliuoli de’ figliuoli, e uccisero un suo nepote e più altra gente, avegna che que’ che furono presi sarebbe essuto loro meglio ad essere morti, perciò che li fecero poi morire di fame in una torre, la quale per loro fia sempre chiamata la Torre de la Fame.

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455 Ibid, 120.
458 Pieri, 57.
From Pieri we get more precise information as to where Ugolino and his family were taken, how they died of hunger in imprisonment and how the tower they died in is now referred to as la Torre de la Fame. One piece of news in this paragraph that is never mentioned by Dante is that one of Ugolino’s grandchildren or nephews was killed before he and the others were locked up. In fact, one of Ugolino’s illegitimate sons, not a grandson or nephew, was killed before the events in the tower. Notice that Archbishop Ruggieri and the role he played in Ugolino’s fate are never mentioned.

The pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle goes into even more detail but provides the erroneous date of 1287. It could have provided Dante with the names of Ugolino’s children and grandchildren, as well as that of Archbishop Ruggieri. See the following quote from the text:

In questo tempo il conte Ugolino esendo signore di Pisa per la mala signoria chelli usava a furoré di popolo colla forza dello arcivescovo di Ubaldini con grande romore gridando: Muoia! Muoia! fu preso e messo in prigione con V tra l’ filli et I nepoti fecero da fame morire in prigione… Allora tantosto Guido conte di Montefeltro comando ke mai al conte Ugolino ed a suoi figli e nepoti fosse dato mangiare, e cosi morirono dinopia e fame tutti e cinque… Cio fue il conte Ugolino e Ugguccione, Brigata, Anselmuccio e Guelfo e qui si trovo keuno mangio dele carnì allaltro, e finalmente fu loro dinedato il sacerdote per confessare i loro peccati e tutti e V in una mattina fuoro tratti morti di prigione. Questi conte Ugolino fue homo di cosi fatta maniera chelli facea morire il popolo di Pisa di fame ed al suo tempo avendo grande abondanza di formento fu si
As you can see from the text I have italicized, Dante could have received all of the information he needed from this text alone. All of the major players are named, the sequence of events matches up with Dante’s, and there is even the accusation that their desperation led to cannibalism.

Finally, we have the chronicle from the Napoletana codex XIII.F.16. Like the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle, it gives the year of 1287 and seems to contain a sort of mixture of information from the previous two chronicles. For example, the anonymous writer of the Napoletana codex defines Ugolino’s “nipoti” as “figliuoli de figliuoli,” which Paolino Pieri also felt the need to do when he wrote, “due suoi nepoti, cioè figliuoli de’ figliuoli.” Like Pieri, the anonymous writer also does not name Archbishop Ruggieri as the man who betrayed Ugolino but does go into more detail about their imprisonment. He says, “li Pisano misero a distretta lo conte Ugolino di Pisa… in una dura prigione e tanto li ritennero senza mangiare e senza bere che tutti e cinque vi morirro di fame.”

Like the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle, the anonymous writer of the Napoletana codex concludes his entry on Ugolino by saying that Ugolino requested to confess his sins to a priest but was denied. In conclusion, between these three sources alone (my search was not exhaustive, so there could be others still) Dante would have all of the information necessary to then allow his imagination to supplement what exactly occurred inside the tower.

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460 Ibid, 288.
Interestingly enough, the pseudo-Brunetto Latini article also contains some news about Lano Maconi. We previously discussed how the only fact of Lano’s life that is explicitly stated in the Comedy is his involvement and death at the battle of Pieve al Toppo. I mentioned that it would be strange for Dante to know the name of a single man’s death in a battle, when it would seem that Lano did not play any major role in the battle (like that of a captain) and yet, the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle does just that: It names Lano and one other man as casualties of the battle.

Tegrimo de’ conti da Porciano podestà d’Arezzo uscio fuori popolo e chavalieri d’Arezzo e fecero battagla alla Pieve al Toppo, a quivi furono i Sanesi sconfitti dalli Aretini lo die di Sancto Johanni di giungno… In questa battagla fu morto il prudentissimo homo Rinuccio di Pepo di conti di Marema e Lano Sanese.\textsuperscript{461}

Even more interesting is that this information appears directly after Ugolino’s story, because the battle occurred right after Ugolino’s death. As I have stated before, the pseudo-Brunetto Latini chronicle would have contained all of the pertinent details on the imprisonment and death of Ugolino, to the point where Dante would not have had to supplement with other sources to account for his knowledge. Combining that with the fact that “Lano sanese” is named as one of two causalities at the battle of Pieve al Toppo makes the pseudo-Brunetto Latini a convincing source for the news contained in Dante’s Comedy.

Of course, it does not account for all of Dante’s information about Lano. Lano is punished in Hell for his prodigality, which means Dante had to have also known that he was a member of the Spendthrift Brigade. But Dante only needed to consult the sonnets

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid, 229.
of his Sienese friend (whom he seems to have had a falling out with) Cecco Angiolieri. Angiolieri talks about Lano in two of his sonnets, 107 and 108. He alludes to Lano’s expensive tastes when he writes about wanting to send him sumptuous gifts: “Dugento scodelline di diamanti/ di bella quadra Lan vorre’ c’avesse,/ e dodici usignuo’ c’ ognuno stesse/ davant’ a llui facendo dolzi canti,/ e cento milia some di basanti” (sonnet 107).

Since Dante knew Angiolieri personally, and Angiolieri clearly knew Lano personally, Angiolieri himself could have served as Dante’s source for information about Lano’s life.

Finally, the last character from this chapter whom Dante could have learned about from a chronicle is Master Adam. Paolino Pieri talks about the infamous crime in his *Croniche delle città di Firenze*, though he does not give Master Adam’s actual name, thus he could not have served as Dante’s only source. He, does, however, give the basic facts of the crime: “Nel MCCLXXXI… Al tenpo di costui, si trovaro fiorini d’oro falsi in quantitade, per un fuoco che ss’apprese in Borgo Sa Lorenço in ca’ degli Anchioni. Et dissesi che li facea fare uno de’ conti da Romeno, et fune preso un loro spenditore et per cose che confessò si fu arso.” We do not get Master Adam’s name nor the amount of dross he added to the gold, but we do get the accusation that the conti Guidi da Romena forced him to do it, and we learn the exact year in which he was burned at the stake for his crime. What is important to note about all of these possible written sources, especially those for Ugolino and Master Adam, is that they match up with the characters who receive the most attention in the *Comedy*, i.e. the characters about whom Dante seemed to

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462 Angiolieri mentions sharing an acquaintance in common with Dante in his sonnet 100: “Lassar vo’ lo trovare di Becchina, / Dante Alighieri, e dir del ‘mariscalco,’” which dates between 1289 and 1294. The two probably met each other when they fought together against Arezzo in 1288. He then addressed sonnet 102, which he wrote around 1302-1303, directly to Dante.


464 Pieri, 50.
be the most informed. This tracks with the idea that the less you have to rely on memory, i.e. an oral tradition, the more you are able to say about any given event. When the information is under your eyes, not stored away in the recesses of your brain, it is much easier to call it forward with precise detail.

All of the written sources mentioned thus far are ones that Dante would have likely read. His interest in history and in human stories that give insight into the light and dark of the human soul—fuel for his poem—would have led him to study up on his chronicles. Obviously as a poet himself, reading others’ poetry was part of the job description. What Dante would not have read as a habit are the government documents of other cities besides Florence, and yet those are all we have in many instances to corroborate the information that Dante provides us. They corroborate the theft Vanni Fucci pulled off and the release of the prisoners Friar Gomita made against Nino Visconti’s will. But occasionally we find no trace of the facts Dante presents to us in any surviving documentation. That is the case with la Pia: The commentators thought they knew who she was, but there is evidence that goes against their theory and none to support it. That means that sometimes, with certain events and certain people, Dante is actually our only surviving account of record. His poem is our history book. We are indebted for what we know solely to the information he provides us. This is also the case with Francesca da Rimini, whose story would have disappeared into oblivion if it were not for Dante. Teodolinda Barolini does an excellent job discussing how the fact that

465 As a government official of Florence, Dante would have had access to many government documents concerning events in his city. However, the events of this chapter were selected specifically for their occurrence outside of Florence.
Dante is our historian of record should affect our critical response to *Inferno* 5. Barolini writes, “[Francesca] became a cultural touchstone and reference point through the intervention of the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, a text that both conjures history that we have been tracing and inverts it, giving to Francesca a dignity and a prominence—a celebrity—that in real life she did not possess.” The same could be said for la Pia, whose very name moves the reader to sympathy, who says three sentences and yet has inspired countless debates and interpretations throughout the centuries. Dante, through the beauty of his verses, had the power to direct history, to be taken at his word, to decide who was and was not significant enough to be remembered.

Much like a historian, Dante possessed the ability to perceive the importance of men and events and to organize them into a narrative; he was not very different from the writers of chronicles, annals, memoirs or saints’ lives. Like a memoirist, Dante had a desire to not allow people’s adventures on this earth to be lost to oblivion. No political or personal event was beyond his purview—no birth, marriage, political misfortune, and certainly no death. Like a historian, events of political significance were perhaps the ones he paid the most attention to. Certainly the *Divine Comedy* pushes a political agenda, and a discussion of politics is never likely to get very far without a discussion of history. Dante thought about history the way a lot of Florentines did: He read signs in the current events of his time, categorizing them as either favors or punishments from God for men’s vices or virtues.

But Dante also differed from a historian in several ways. First, he differed in his treatment of violent characters. Many of the individuals Dante writes into the *Comedy*

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committed criminal acts. In his introduction to *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, Lauro Martines discusses how a novelist and an historian would cover a violent act in two very different ways.⁴⁶⁸ He says that while the historian would look at the public policies and political conditions that led the individual to commit the crime, the novelist would only furnish as much institutional context as was absolutely necessary to hold his reader’s attention. By this definition, Dante aligns much more with the novelist. He only occasionally sees fit to rant about the civic institutions that have led men down the path of evil. The historian also tends to choose subjects that exemplify a trend or are representative of a larger issue. The historian is looking for patterns. But Dante is looking solely at the individual, judging each and every man or woman on his or her singular deeds on earth. Martines writes, “The student of the subject, accordingly, will not be seriously interested in random or personal violence, unless it falls into patterns that reveal trends and disclose the play of impersonal currents…”⁴⁶⁹ Dante, on the other hand, was fascinated by the personal, by revenge, by crimes of passion.

Secondly, Dante differed from a historian in that he was not interested in verifying his information, relying only on eyewitness accounts and supplementing with trustworthy documentation. For Dante, history and chronicle, sacred and profane mythology, and, above all, stories both documentary and imaginary are all on the same stage. They are all the truth.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that Dante was a proto-journalist, because of how many newsworthy events he paid attention to and wrote about. While Dante might have fit the mold of a *proto*-journalist, he differed from our modern-day

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⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, 10.
understanding of a journalist in one very big way: He was not reporting information; he
was recording it. Records and reports differ from each other in very specific ways.
Records are addressed to general posterity, while reports are made for immediate use
with a very precise readership in mind; reports tend to live in the oral tradition, while
records are written down with the intent of being used again in the future; reports
disappear, while records stick around. Dante was not writing to an immediate audience
but rather to readers of the future. So in a way you might say he was writing old news,
but that’s because he was teaching his readers lessons whose relevance lasted long after
the events themselves. Dante also wasn’t so concerned with accuracy; he does not seem
to make an attempt to verify his sources and in fact takes liberties with the information he
has. What Dante was interested in recording wasn’t the facts of the events themselves; it
was the moral issues that arose from the events. He was interested in the salvation of
individual souls and the welfare of his city. Any piece of news that could illustrate an
example of good, evil or the giant grey area in between was of relevance to Dante, and
everything else was of disinterest to him and his masterpiece. Dante believed that a just
society was the essential context for personal virtue, and real people’s stories were the
best way to illustrate that. We, as Dante’s readers, are supposed to use those stories to
understand our role in making a virtuous or wicked society.

\[^{470}\text{Dante makes an explicit reference to his readers of the future in Paradiso 17; “coloro / che questo tempo chiameranno antico” (119-120).}\]
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