

“Mars”
Guy P. Raffa

acciaguida. Cantos 15.13-18.51

By imagining a meeting with his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida in the central episode of the *Paradiso*, Dante elects a father-figure as his spokesman for several of the most significant ideas of the entire poem, much as he did with Brunetto Latini in the *Inferno* and Marco Lombardo in the *Purgatorio*. Documents in Florence confirm the historical existence of Cacciaguida, but his words in the poem are our only source for details of his life. We calculate that he was born in 1091 (*Par.* 16.34-39), entered the Christian faith in the Florentine baptistery (*Par.* 15.134-35), lived in an old quarter of Florence when its population was a fifth of its size in 1300 (*Par.* 16.46-48), became a knight under the emperor Conrad III, and was killed in the disastrous Second Crusade (*Par.* 15.139-48), most likely in 1147 when Conrad lost the bulk of his army on the way to the Holy Land. Cacciaguida not only provides the most detailed prophecy in the poem of Dante's impending exile and the difficult years to follow (*Par.* 17.46-99), but he also emphasizes the theme of societal decline by describing the pure and tranquil (if mythical) past of Florence (*Par.* 15.97-129) and then using this idealized past to lament the city's fall to its sordid state of affairs in the present (*Par.* 16.46-154).

Famous Holy Warriors. Canto 18.28-48

Cacciaguida concludes his long appearance in Mars by directing Dante's eyes back up to the cross. One by one, eight warrior spirits flash along the arms of the cross as Cacciaguida names them (*Par.* 18.37-48). God appointed **Joshua**, son of Nun, as the successor to Moses who would lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 31:23). Joshua conquered Jericho--ordering that only the prostitute Rahab (who appears in Venus: *Par.* 9.115-26) and her family be allowed to live--and many other cities and towns, thus delivering the land west of the Jordan river to the children of Israel, as God had promised (Joshua 6-11). The "noble Maccabeus" is **Judas Maccabeus**, the valiant Jewish warrior (second century BCE) who freed the Israelites from the violent persecution of King Antiochus of Syria and his successors (1 Maccabees 3-9; 2 Maccabees 8-15). Fighting for the very survival of his people and their religion, Judas led his brave troops, vastly outnumbered by opposing armies, to a series of military victories, and he and his men repaired and cleansed the defiled holy places, culminating in the eight-day dedication of a new temple altar. Before he was slain in battle, Judas also helped protect the people of Israel against their enemies in the region by forging an alliance with the powerful Romans. From medieval

Source URL: <http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/paradiso/05mars.html>
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/engl409>

French history and legend, Cacciaguida pairs **Charlemagne**, who restored the Roman Empire in the West, with his nephew and paladin **Roland**. Charlemagne defeated the Lombard king, Desiderius (in 773) and was crowned emperor in Rome on Christmas Day, 800. Roland, hero of *The Song of Roland*, was famous for the prodigious sound of his ivory horn, though it did not serve him at Roncevalles, where he and the rear guard of the army were slain as a result of the treachery of Ganelon, who is now punished among the traitors in Hell (*Inf.* 32.122). **William of Orange** and **Renouard** are heroes who appear together in other French epic poems. After William discovered Renouard, a Muslim of gigantic stature who worked in the royal kitchen (he had been sold into slavery), to be his brother-in-law, the two men joined forces and fought on behalf of the Franks. William and Renouard (following his conversion to Christianity) spent the final years of their lives together in a monastery. The final two spirits in Mars named by Cacciaguida, **Duke Godfrey** and **Robert Guiscard**, were military leaders from the eleventh century. Godfrey of Bouillon, duke of Lorraine, played a major role in the First Crusade and was elected sovereign of Jerusalem after the city was captured in 1099. Robert Guiscard waged numerous battles in southern Italy in support of the Church (see also *Inf.* 28.13-14). Renowned for fighting for their people and their faith even unto death, these soldiers now stand out among those who adorn the cross in Mars and sing the battle cry to "rise up" and "conquer" (*Par.* 14.125).

Classical and Biblical Models. Cantos 15-17

In the heaven of Mars, Dante models his encounter with a blood relative, his great-great grandfather Cacciaguida, on both classical and biblical examples. He explicitly compares Cacciaguida's happiness in welcoming his progeny to the affection displayed by **Anchises** toward his son **Aeneas** when they meet in the underworld of Virgil's epic (*Par.* 15.25-27): accompanied by the Sibyl, Aeneas enters Elysium, the pleasant fields of Hades, where the shade of Anchises weeps for joy upon realizing that his longing to see--and speak with--his son will be satisfied (*Aeneid* 6.684-94). As Cacciaguida does for Dante, Anchises reveals future events, both good and bad, to his son. Thus Aeneas witnesses the successful completion of his journey from Troy to Italy that will lead to the foundation of the formidable Roman Empire, but he also learns that this glory will not occur without violence and hardship. Cacciaguida then calls Dante by the same Latin phrase--*sanguis meus* ("my blood"; *Par.* 15.28)--used by Anchises to designate the spirit of Julius Caesar whom he urges to refrain from waging war against his homeland (*Aeneid* 6.834-35). By invoking (in Latin) the divine grace through which the gates of Heaven will have twice opened for Dante (now as a living man and later--

after he has died--as a blessed spirit) (*Par.* 15.28-30), Cacciaguida also recalls the claim of the apostle **Paul** to have seen Paradise while still alive (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). More broadly, both Cacciaguida and Dante appear in Mars as figures of **Christ**. Cacciaguida's martyrdom is modeled on the suffering of Christ on the cross (the visual sign of Mars), while Dante's exile reflects the medieval representation of Christ's earthly life as a period of exile. Alan of Lille, for instance, writes that, as a result of the Incarnation, God "suffered every pain of exile that Himself an exile, He might bring back the miserable from exile" (*Anticlaudianus* 5.525-26). Dante introduces his Christlike role in Mars by having Cacciaguida echo the heavenly voice heard at Christ's baptism--"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17)--when he identifies himself: "O my branch, in whom I took pleasure just awaiting you, I was your root" (*Par.* 15.88-89).

Dante perhaps models his encounter with Cacciaguida in Mars most thoroughly on the meeting of **Scipio Africanus the Younger** with his adoptive grandfather, **Scipio Africanus the Elder**, in *The Dream of Scipio*. This short text, the final part of Cicero's *Republic*, was very popular in the Middle Ages thanks to the influential commentary by Macrobius (born in the late fourth century CE) that accompanied it. The two works share an overarching thematic structure: the protagonist (Scipio the Younger, Dante), who is also the narrator, meets in the heavens the spirit of his ancestor (Scipio the Elder, Cacciaguida); this deceased family member prophesies sorrowful events for his descendent (Scipio's assassination, Dante's exile) but at the same time exhorts him to accomplish a great mission with both personal and societal implications (Scipio's civic leadership, Dante's epic vision of the afterlife). Scipio's dream and Dante's journey each occur when the protagonist is at--or is about to turn--age thirty-five. Scipio hears how his considerable military and political achievements on behalf of the state will not spare him a cruel death at the hands of his kinsmen (2.2). He is most upset by the thought that relatives will carry out the treacherous plot ("insidiarum a meis" [3.2]). Dante's fate, as revealed by Cacciaguida, will also require an acceptance of "bitter with the sweet" (*Par.* 18.3). On the one hand, Dante will suffer the pain of unjust banishment from Florence after the take-over of the black guelfs orchestrated by Pope Boniface VIII (*Par.* 17.46-51, 17.55-60), and his fellow exiles will respond to their misfortune in a foolish, dishonorable manner (*Par.* 17.61-65). Dante's exile, similar to Scipio's demise, will result from deceit and betrayal, "the snares [*le 'nsidie*] that are hidden behind a few circlings" (*Par.* 17.95-96). On the other hand, Dante will enjoy the satisfaction of seeing the eventual defeat of his political enemies (*Par.* 17.53-54, 17.65-69), and through his poetry he will deliver a message that will help to heal an ailing world (*Par.* 17.130-32). Best of all,

Source URL: <http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/paradiso/05mars.html>
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/engl409>

Dante, like his Roman predecessor, is promised a return trip--this time for good--to the blessed realm (*Par.* 15.29-30), at least in part as a reward for his commitment to justice and righteousness.

Both texts also require us to perform mathematical calculations to determine the age of a character at his death. Scipio is told that his life will be cut short by his kinsmen (as it in fact was) when his age "has completed seven times eight recurring circuits of the sun" (2.2), meaning fifty-six years. For Cacciaguida, who died in the Second Crusade in 1147 (*Par.* 15.139-48), we must calculate his year of birth by converting five hundred eighty Martian years to earth years (*Par.* 16.34-39). Knowing, as Dante likely did from a work by the Islamic astronomer al-Farghani ("Alfraganus"), that one year on Mars equals six hundred eighty-seven days on earth, we can date Cacciaguida's birth to 1091 (687 times 580 divided by 365): he, too, therefore lived to age fifty-six--the same age, in an eerie instance of life imitating art, at which Dante himself died in Ravenna (1265-1321).