

Configuring Vision: A Call for Allegorical Interpretations of Medieval Artifacts via Overlay Technology

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In medievalism's ongoing effort to render the Middle Ages more immediate, overlay technology may, as it were, be a game-changer. As Jay Bolter and Maria Engberg suggested at the 29th Annual Conference of the International Society for the Study of Medievalism, the ability to aim a cell phone or other portable device at, say, Metz Cathedral and to have the device call up relevant music, verbal description, visual details, and/or vistas of the monument's former appearance could greatly enhance the user's understanding of the cathedral's historical form, function, and significance.¹ But I believe we can maximize this technology's potential only if we go beyond the literal references that have thus far dominated its use.² To better appreciate past perspectives on an artifact, we must overlay its present appearance with earlier metaphors for it, and if we need a medieval precedent for blending the literal and the allegorical, we have only to look at the first folio of Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 597 (Fig. 1).

There, in the bas-de-page of this early fourteenth-century manuscript, which comprises a 30-folio copy of the *Inferno* followed by Fra Guido da Pisa's 204-folio *Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis* and his 4-folio *Dichiarazione poetica dell'Inferno*, Buonamico Buffalmacco interprets Dante's first three foes as figural allegories (Fig. 2).³ Rather than present the relationship between the literal and metaphorical as

¹ The conference, which was hosted by Leah Hought, Valerie B. Johnson, and Richard Utz, was held at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia, 24-25 October 2014. Bolter and Engberg's presentation, as well as an earlier draft of this essay, were delivered in Session 24: "The (Augmented) Cathedral and the (Magic) Book: Image, Space, and Experience in the Middle Ages and the Digital Age."

² See, for example, the application of this technology to Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia, at <<http://www.auburn.gatech.edu/demos/>> [last accessed 11 November 2014].

³ For perhaps the best, comparatively recent summaries of what is known or suspected about Guido, beyond his scholarship, see Vincenzo Cioffari's introduction to his transcription of Guido's *Expositiones et glose super Comediam Dantis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), esp. xiv-xvi, and Francesco Mazzoni's entry on Guido for the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, ed. Umberto Bosco, 6 vols. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-1978), 3:325-28. For older discussions, often effectively summarized by Cioffari and/or Mazzoni, see Giovanni Livi, *Dante, suoi primi cultori, sua gente in Bologna* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1918), esp. 58-64; idem., *Dante e Bologna: Nuovi studi e documenti* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1921), esp. 96-100; L. Jenaro-MacLennan's "The Dating of Guido da Pisa's Commentary on the *Inferno*," *Italian Studies* 23 (1968): 19-54 (45-46), which was copied nearly verbatim for "The Dating of Guido da Pisa's Commentary," Chap. 1 in Jenaro-MacLennan's *The Trecento Commentaries on the "Divina Commedia" and the Epistle to Cangrande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 22-58; and Enzo Orvieto, "Guido da Pisa e il commento inedito all'*Inferno* dantesco. Le chiose al trentatresimo canto," *Italica* 46 (1969): 17-32. Note, however, that Livi devotes much of the relevant pages in his 1921 book to defending a now-discredited identification of Guido. For a transcription of and introduction to the *Dichiarazione*, also known as the *Declaratio*, see Francesco Mazzoni's critical edition of it (Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1970). For almost all of the miniatures in the manuscript, see Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss, and Charles Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the "Divine Comedy"*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). In the first of those two volumes, and multiple other publications, especially "An Illuminated *Inferno* and Trecento Painting in Pisa," *The Art Bulletin* 47 (1965): 21-34, which was copied almost verbatim for the main discussion of the Chantilly codex in *Illuminated*

“this for that,” much less “this or that,” Buffalmacco treats it as “this and that.”⁴ He blends the literal and the metaphorical in a manner that foreshadows the way overlay technology could suggest they co-exist in past perceptions of medieval artifacts.

After Dante’s protagonist enters the dark woods in the first canto of the *Inferno*, a leopard “light-footed and very fleet” (Inf. 1.32), but apparently not terribly ferocious, blocks his path.⁵ In contrast to the fight-or-flight response we might expect from a real leopard, this one merely holds its ground and rather benignly rebuffs the Pilgrim. But, then, this may not be a “real” leopard, for it is accompanied by an even more unnatural lion and by a wolf with overtly metaphorical powers.

Particularly in juxtaposition with the leopard, the lion seems extraordinarily ferocious, as it comes at the Pilgrim “head high and raging with hunger, so that the air seemed to tremble at it” (Inf. 1.47-48). The stage is set for an epic struggle or a dramatic escape. Yet, in the very next line, the lion is completely eclipsed by a wolf that “in her leanness seemed laden with every craving and had already caused many to live in sorrow” (Inf. 1.49-51), a creature that, according to the narrator:

Manuscripts, Meiss assigned the miniatures to Francesco Traini or a close follower and, building on Traini’s corpus, particularly his frescoes for the Camposanto in Pisa, dated the miniatures to the 1340s. However, in *Buffalmacco e il Trionfo della Morte* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974; repr. Milan: 5 Continents, 2003), Luciano Bellosi subsequently built a convincing case for assigning the relevant frescoes in the Camposanto to Buonamico Buffalmacco. And the many parallels between, on the one hand, those frescoes and, on the other, the Chantilly miniatures make it extremely likely that Buffalmacco and his studio decorated this manuscript, a probability that corresponds well to many scholars’ dating of the manuscript’s text, particularly the assignment of it to approximately 1328 by Jenaro-MacLennan in “The Dating of Guido da Pisa’s Commentary” and the first chapter of his *Trecento Commentaries*. For more on Buffalmacco in general, see Bellosi. For the major contemporary and near-contemporary references to Buffalmacco, see: Giorgio Vasari, “Buonamico Buffalmacco,” in *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, 6 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1987); novelle CXXXVI, CLXI, CLXIX, CXCI, and CXCII, among others, in *Le novelle di Franco Sacchetti*, ed. Ottavio Gigli, 2 vols. (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1909); and passages 8:3, 8:6, 8:9, and 9:5 in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, from *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 4, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1976). For much on how Vasari revised Buffalmacco’s life and art, see Bellosi, *Buffalmacco e il Trionfo*, esp. 121; Paul Barolsky, *Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1991), 14-15, 17-18, 20-26, 30-31; and Norman E. Land, “Vasari’s Buffalmacco and the Transubstantiation of Paint,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 58 (2005): 881-95.

⁴ For much more on figural allegory, particularly in relationship to Dante’s writing, begin with the seminal text on it: Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” *Archivum Romanicum* 22 (1938): 436-89. See also the many works by his followers, particularly four essays by Singleton: “Allegory” and “Two Kinds of Allegory,” in *Dante’s “Commedia”: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 1-17, and 80-98; “The Irreducible Dove,” *Comparative Literature* 9 (1957): 129-35; and “*In Exitu Israel de Aegypto*,” *Dante Studies* 78 (1960): 1-24. For a good, quick introduction to both sides of the debate over whether the *Commedia* is in fact a figural allegory, see Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine “Comedy”: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. her first chapter, “Detheologizing Dante: Realism, Reception, and the Resources of Narrative,” 3-20. For a concise summary of the opposition to Singleton and Auerbach, seeCarolynn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 210-12.

⁵ All quotations of the *Commedia* are from Giorgio Petrocchi’s edition (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67), and all translations of the *Commedia* are from Singleton’s edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970-75).

put such heaviness upon me with the fear that came from sight of her that I lost hope of the height. And like one who is eager in winning, but, when the time comes that makes him lose, weeps and is saddened in all his thoughts, such did that peaceless beast make me, as coming on against me, she pushed me back, little by little, to where the sun is silent. (Inf. 1.52-60)

If the strange behavior of the leopard and the abrupt intrusion of the lion do not convince the reader that the animals have a metaphorical significance, the supernatural power of the wolf should erase any doubt. Even by the standards of medieval zoology, it is unlikely that a wolf could eclipse a hungry lion. And after a leopard and a lion, it would be absurd if an ordinary wolf so weighted one with fearfulness that he or she abandoned hope of passing and was driven back “to where the sun is silent.” But, of course, this is no ordinary wolf, for its “leanness seemed laden with every craving,” and it “had already caused many to live in sorrow.” Eventually it will be vanquished by the “Greyhound” that “shall be the salvation of [. . .] low-lying Italy” (Inf. 1.106) as it hunts the wolf “through every town till he has thrust her back into Hell, whence envy first sent her forth” (Inf. 1.109-11). But, until that time, the wolf is so overwhelming that it provokes the narrator to compare himself with every other avaricious soul, “who is eager in winning, but, when the time comes that makes him lose, weeps and is saddened in all his thoughts.”⁶

Clearly, the three beasts represent something in addition to their biological signifieds, but that fact, much less precisely what else they represent, are not articulated nearly as clearly and quickly as they would be in traditional forms of allegory.⁷ Rather than immediately define the literal by juxtaposing it with the metaphorical upon first mention of a signified, Dante subtly and extensively blends the metaphorical with the literal, and, particularly since he wraps the *Commedia* around claims that the protagonist’s journey is a recollection or a vision or both, the reader may need a great deal of time to detect that the signifier indeed has a(nother) metaphorical identity.⁸

Though Dante’s own *Convivio* identifies such relationships as “allegories of the theologians” and distinguishes them from traditional allegories, which he calls “allegories

⁶ For a good introduction to the issues and vast literature on the first canto, particularly the meaning of the three beasts, see Anthony K. Cassell, *“Inferno” I*, *Lectura Dantis Americana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

⁷ For enduring introductions to how allegory was perceived during the fourteenth century, especially in relation to Quintilian’s highly influential (and ambiguous) definition in *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII, vi, 44, “Aliud verbis aliud sensu,” see: Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964; repr. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 2; Northrop Frye, “Allegory,” in *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 12-15; and Mary Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 10-11.

⁸ As observed by Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 103. For more on these characteristics of Dante’s text, in the context of identifying it as figural allegory, see note 4, above. On the literal as in fact metaphorical, see Quilligan, who points out on page 67 of *The Language of Allegory* that even the literal signifies something—if nothing else, the images evoked in one’s mind by words or images. The metaphorical, however, simultaneously represents the literal and at least one other thing, and it is in these senses that I use and distinguish between the terms “literal” and “metaphorical”.

of the poets,”⁹ fourteenth-century commentators ignore the subtlety with which he refers to the metaphorical identity of the beasts and directly associate the leopard with lust, the lion with pride, and the wolf with avarice.¹⁰ As Guido da Pisa explains, these are the three vices “that impede every man who wants to ascend toward virtues”: lust attracts the adolescent; pride besets primarily youth, “because that age covets honors, just as adolescence covets pleasure”; and avarice besets especially those who are growing old.¹¹ By thereby extending the moral implications of the vices to Everyman, Guido and his colleagues acknowledge the tropological significance of the literal and of the typological meanings of the beasts. And in the eschatological context of the *Inferno*, the tropological meaning has anagogical repercussions for our immortal soul. Thus, the commentators apply the traditional four-fold medieval schema of allegory to the beasts.¹²

Nor do Buffalmacco’s fellow illuminators, some of whom were advised by the commentators and/or other scholars, treat the three beasts as having any meaning outside of traditional allegory.¹³ Indeed, other than locating them on the frontispiece to the

⁹ Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. Cesare Vasoli and Domenico de Robertis, *Opere minori*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1988; repr. as vol. 2, nos. 1-2, Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1995). For more on this aspect of the *Convivio*, see Singleton, “Allegory,” 15-16, and idem, “Irreducible Dove,” 131.

¹⁰ Jacopo di Dante, *Chiose alla Cantica dell’“Inferno” di Dante Alighieri attribuite a Jacopo suo figlio*, ed. Lord Vernon (Florence: Tommaso Baracchi, 1848), 5; Guido da Pisa, *Expositiones et Glose*, 23; Andrea di Ser Lancia, *L’Ottimo Commento della “Divina Commedia”: Testo inedito di un contemporaneo del poeta*, ed. Alessandro Torri, 3 vols. (Pisa: Niccolò Capurro, 1827-29), 1:5-6; the Anonimo Selmi-ano, *Le antiche chiose anonime all’“Inferno” di Dante second il testo Marciano (Ital. Cl. IX, Cod. 179)*, ed. Giuseppe Avalle, Collezione di opuscoli danteschi inediti o rari, LXI-LXII (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1900), 2; Pietro di Dante, *Il “Commentarium” di Pietro Alighieri nelle redazioni Ashburnhamiana e Otoboniana*, ed. Roberto della Vedova and Maria Teresa Silvotti (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1978), 32; Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la “Comedia”*, ed. Giorgio Padoan (1965; repr. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1994), 73-78; Falso Boccaccio, *Chiose sopra Dante*, ed. G. G. Warren, Lord Vernon (Florence: Piatti, 1846), 15; Benvenuto da Imola, *Benvenuto Rambaldi da Imola illustrato nella vita e nelle opere, e di lui Commento Latino sulla “Divina Commedia” di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Giovanni Tamburini, 3 vols. (Imola: Galeati, 1855-56), 1:36-37; and the Anonimo Fiorentino, *Commento alla “Divina Commedia” d’Anonimo Fiorentino del secolo XIV*, ed. Pietro Fanfani, 3 vols. (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1866-74), 1:14-15.

¹¹ The translations of these passages are from Vincenzo Cioffari, “Guido da Pisa’s Basic Interpretation: A Translation of the First Two Cantos,” *Dante Studies* 93 (1975): 1-25 (10). The original text of the first quote, like that of the second, appears on folio 37v of the manuscript and is recorded on page 23 of Cioffari’s transcription as: “tria vitia que impediunt omnem hominem volentem scandere ad virtutes.” The second translation derives from and is contextualized by a much longer passage:

Prima namque fera dicitur lonza, diversis depicta coloribus, et signat luxuriam, que adolescentes maxime ad se trahit. Secunda fera dicitur leo, qui propter suam audaciam et propter colerara quam habet adustam, propter quam dicitur pati quartanam, superbiam prefiguratur, que quidem maxime habet iuvenes impedire; quia talis etas avida est honoris, sicut adolescentia est avida voluptatis. Tertia vero fera dicitur esse lupa, que propter sui ingluviem et insatiabilem famem habet avaritiam figurare. Que quidem senescentes habet spetialiter impedire, et semper ipsa cum ipsis senescentibus iuvenescit, nunquamque senescit.

¹² For more on this, as well as a basic explanation of the four-fold medieval schema of allegory to the beasts, see Cassell, “*Inferno*” I, esp. 46.

¹³ As Meiss observes in the catalogue for *Illuminated Manuscripts* (1:318-19), the earliest known copy of Guiniforto degli Bargigi’s commentary on the *Commedia* accompanies and accords with an otherwise unique cycle of *Commedia* miniatures (now split between Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS italien 2017 and Imola, Biblioteca Comunale MS 32) by the *Vitae Imperatorum* Master for Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan, who often employed Guiniforto as a scholarly advisor, particularly in relationship to

cantica and/or devoting an extraordinarily large amount of parchment to them, 14 only four miniatures suggest that the beasts have any significance apart from their biological identity. Three of them do so by labeling the leopard “lust”, the lion “pride”, and the wolf “avarice.”¹⁵ But Buffalmacco’s first illustration of the beasts goes beyond merely appending a metaphorical identity to the literal and intertwines them in such a way as to form a pictorial echo of Dante’s figural allegory.¹⁶

When Buffalmacco, who was a major Florentine rival of Giotto, illuminated the Musée Condé manuscript in approximately 1328, he almost certainly had help from Guido da Pisa.¹⁷ Single sequential alphabetical letters next to or in eight of the fifty-six miniatures in the bas-de-page of the commentary apparently refer to a separate list of instructions for Buffalmacco,¹⁸ and it is difficult to imagine anyone other than Guido noticing the commentator’s two-word reference to Plutus as the “episcopum avarorum,” much less recommending that Buffalmacco depict that figure with the miter and crozier he sports on the verso of folio 70.¹⁹

Yet, though Guido may have chosen the location and subject matter of the miniatures, fourteenth-century instructions to illuminators suggest he would have left the form of the miniatures, particularly its details, to the artist.²⁰ Thus, it was almost cer-

the duke’s famous and comparatively extensive manuscript collection. Also note that the extraordinarily sophisticated *Commedia* miniatures in British Library MS Yates Thompson 36, which dates to the 1440s and was illuminated by Giovanni di Paolo and at least one other Sienese artist, may have been influenced by Guiniforto, for, according to Meiss in the catalogue for *Illuminated Manuscripts* (1:268), Guiniforto was employed in 1432 at the court of the manuscript patron, Alfonso I of Naples, and collected manuscripts for Alfonso after that time. For a thorough introduction to the varieties and roles of advisors in relationship to illuminators, as well as for an authoritative discussion of the forms in which the advisors’ recommendations survive, begin with Jonathan J. G. Alexander’s *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 3, “Programmes and Instructions for Illuminators,” 52-71.

¹⁴ See, for example, the anonymous, fourteenth-century Florentine frontispiece in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale MS Palatini 320, as reproduced in *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, pl. 14.

¹⁵ They are the anonymous, early fifteenth-century Florentine frontispiece in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS Vitrina 23-2, which is reproduced as plate 15 in volume 2 of *Illuminated Manuscripts*; an anonymous, mid-fifteenth-century Italian illustration of *Inferno* 1 in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 10057, fol. 4r; and an anonymous late fourteenth-century Italian illustration of *Inferno* 1 in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Holkham Miscellanae 48, p. 1, which is illustrated as plate 42b in the second volume of *Illuminated Manuscripts*.

¹⁶ Buffalmacco illustrates the Pilgrim’s encounter with the three beasts (and Virgil) on the recto of folio 34, directly beneath an early portion of Guido’s *Deductio textus de vulgari in latinum* for *Inferno* 1.

¹⁷ For more on Buffalmacco, see note 3, above. For more on which and how scholars advised *Commedia* illuminators, see note 13, above.

¹⁸ Six of these letters are mentioned by Francesco Paolo Luiso in “Di un’opera inedita di Frate Guido da Pisa,” in *Miscellanea di studi critici pubblicati in onore di Guido Mazzoni*, ed. A. Della Torre and P. L. Rambaldi, 2 vols. (Florence: Tipografia Galileiana, 1907), 1:79-135 (89), and two more are mentioned by Meiss in note 49 on page 46 of his essay for the first volume of *Illuminated Manuscripts*, “The Smiling Pages,” 31-80. For more on the medieval use of such references to lists of recommendations, begin with Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators*, 57-60.

¹⁹ As noted by Peter Brieger on page 85 of his essay for the first volume of *Illuminated Manuscripts*, “Pictorial Commentaries to the *Commedia*,” 81-113.

²⁰ On the likely scope of recommendations beyond subject matter and location, begin with Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators*, esp. chap. 3, “Programmes and Instructions for Illuminators,” 52-71.

tainly Buffalmacco who pictorially adapted the commentator's otherwise unique treatment of the *Commedia* as a lived experience to an illustration that compositionally, if not iconographically, treats the three beasts as a figural allegory.²¹

Unlike standard allegorical images, the Musée Condé image of the beasts maintains the integrity of its narrative surface while referring to metaphorical meanings from within otherwise literal contexts. That is to say, it merely hints that the figures have metaphorical meaning or meanings, and it pictorially explains the relationship between their different levels of meaning in such a subtle and polyvalent manner that, as in Dante's text, the three beasts are only gradually revealed to be allegories.

This revelation begins with the three primary means by which the images indicate that the lion, leopard, and wolf have symbolic meanings. First, the miniatures lack a narrative setting; the beasts nearly fill their frame, and where the background peeks between their legs or around their edges, it is as blank as most of the folio outside the frames. Second, the images lack narrative action; rather than interact with each other or anything else, the beasts merely sit in profile or stand in profile facing towards the left. Third, owing in no small part to the first two means, the miniatures allude to coins and medallions of the period;²² the frames resemble rims, and the three beasts echo some emblems commonly used to represent issuers of coins or medallions, as the beasts are alone, alert, and in profile, as menacing yet static as many heraldic symbols.

However, the metaphorical identity of the beasts is, in this instance, encased in the literalness of illusionism. The images not only resemble medallions but also seem to possess many of the same properties as do their cast counterparts. The heavy hinges that suspend the frames from the vine suggest that the medallions have weight, and the dark edges of the frames and of the beasts give them depth. Indeed, as the tone of the frames grows lighter towards the center of their width and as the tone of the beasts grows lighter towards the center of their bodies, both frame and emblem seem to rise from the folio and to project towards the viewer. The shading gives them, and implicitly the rest of their vehicle, volume and encourages us to see these paintings as in fact medallions.

Of course, despite apparent differences, this illusionism may at least partly promote the symbolic identity of the beasts. We are not encouraged to fear the literal beasts or even to conceive of them as flesh and blood, for they are not presented as "real." But their metaphorical identity is, in fact, introduced into our space as something pertinent to our lives. And if the reader has any awareness of the religious ambitions of the *Commedia*, especially if he or she recognizes any of the obvious typological texts for it, such as Revelation or the Aeneid, these miniatures also have a tropological significance, a relevance for our moral present. They thus potentially embody the full four-fold medieval schema of allegory, for, in the obviously eschatological setting of the *Commedia*, the tropological evokes the anagogical.

Yet the literal framing of the metaphorical in the miniatures is ultimately betrayed. To find medallions hung from a vine by ribbons or chains would be extraordinary; to discover them hung by leaves, as in the miniatures, is literally incredible. This fantastic

²¹ For more on Guido's approach and its differences from those of other *Commedia* commentators, begin with Karl Fugelso, "The Artist as Reader: Buffalmacco's Illuminations for the *Divine Comedy*," *Dante Studies* 122 (2005): 137-71, esp. 143-45.

²² For examples, such as that at <<http://munzeo.com/coin/1390-1406-spanish-medieval-coin-1900070>> [last accessed 12 November 2014], one has merely to look up "medieval coins" on the web.

conjunction of natural and artificial forms undermines the verisimilitude of its constituents, as does the difference in their degree of three-dimensionality. Whereas the surface of each medallion is carefully articulated and shaded to establish relief, the surface of each leaf is decorated with a merely schematic pattern of veining. A difference in tone with an adjacent leaf or with another subject may contribute to greater three-dimensionality for the composition as a whole, but each leaf, in and of itself, does not achieve the same relief and sculptural presence that one finds in the medallions. Like the other organic forms that sprout from the vine, the leaves cling to the folio and belong more to its two-dimensional field than to the three-dimensional space in front of it.

In much the same way that the *Commedia* draws attention to its own means, the images of the medallions thereby draw attention to their own means. The literal and metaphorical components of the miniatures are not merely juxtaposed, as they are in any allegory, but also intertwined and difficult to distinguish. Like Dante, Buffalmacco refers to the metaphorical from within the literal; he permits us to define the representative status of the narrative components only by carefully comparing their acknowledgment of their medium and by concomitantly catching the illogic of their concatenation. Much as the ability of a wolf to inhabit every town suggests it has a metaphorical dimension, the vegetal suspension of the medallions suggests that the emblems on those medallions represent something in addition to three animals.

In thereby echoing Dante's treatment of the beasts, and implicitly the rest of the *Commedia*, as a figural allegory, Buffalmacco provides a medieval precedent for conflating the literal and the symbolic in our perception of medieval (and other) artifacts. And as much as I applaud the ability of overlay technology to collapse the literal present with our interpretation of the literal past, I look forward to the day we invoke our medieval heritage and greatly expand appreciation of it by employing this new tool to transpose medieval allegories on the literal present and/or our interpretation of the literal past, to, say, portray Metz Cathedral as not only a stone edifice but also Jerusalem, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and a ship to that Heavenly Jerusalem.

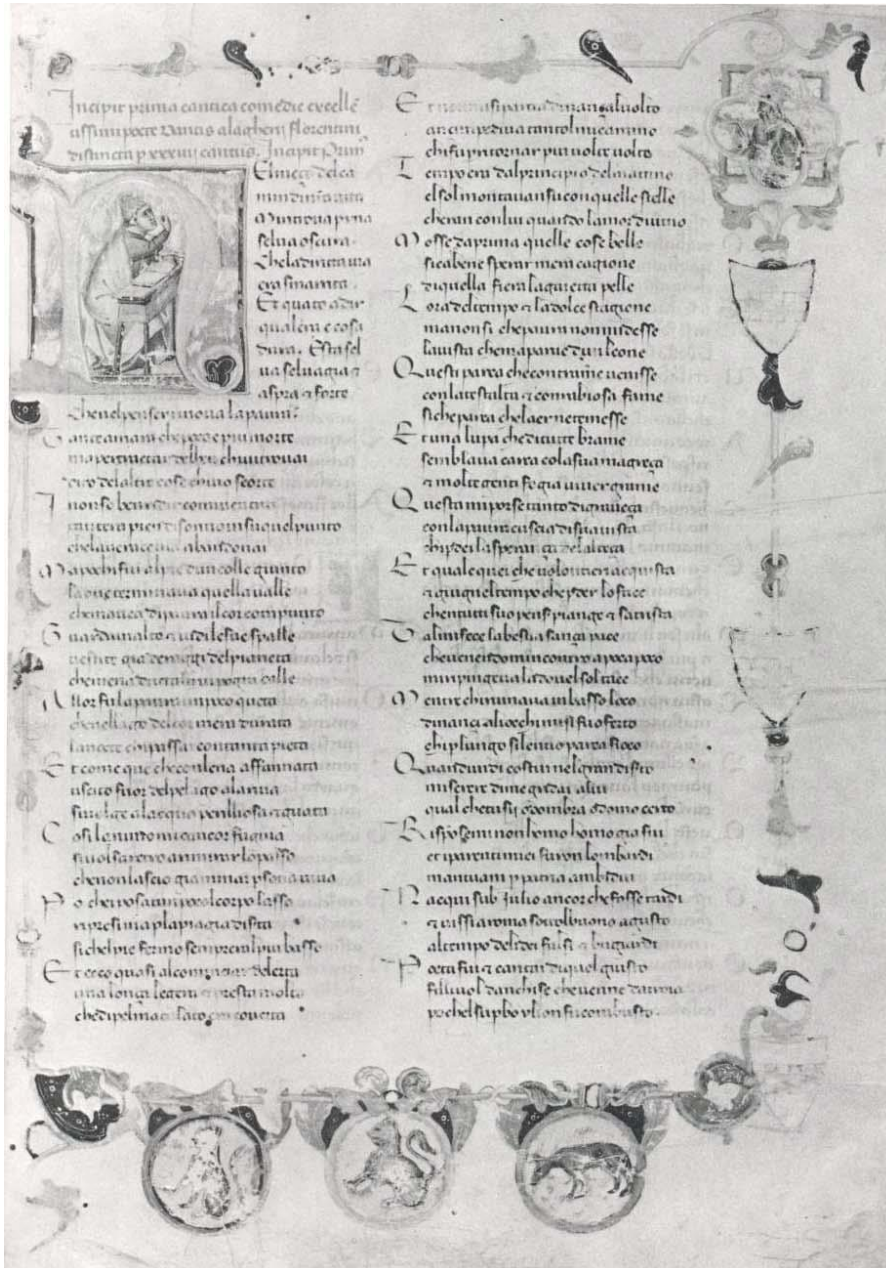


Figure 1. Buonamico Buffalmacco, The Three Beasts, ca. 1328, Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 597, folio 1r.

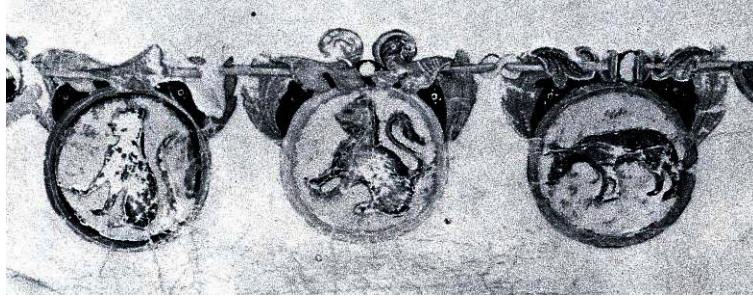


Figure 2. Buonamico Buffalmacco, The Three Beasts, ca. 1328, Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 597, detail of folio 1r.

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