Bibliographical Note

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Since the publication of the first volume of Robert Davidsohn's *Geschichte von Florenz* in 1896, interest in medieval Florentine history has steadily increased. This book was the first to employ, somewhat systematically, the vast riches of the extensive Tuscan archives. It suggested the abundant possibilities for a sensitive portrayal of Florentine history if the materials could be utilized skillfully. Gino Capponi, in his *Storia della repubblica di Firenze* (3 vols.; Florence, 1876), and F. Perrens, in his *Histoire de Florence depuis ses origines jusqu'à la domination des Médicis* (6 vols.; Paris, 1877–83), had already written lengthily and well on varied aspects of Florentine political life, but too frequently these authors had used documentary evidence only as an embellishment to the narrative of chroniclers. Davidsohn worked for almost four decades from this seemingly inexhaustible treasure trove of materials to construct the scaffolding for an interpretation that would rival the one only recently erected by his hero Gregorovius for medieval Rome. Anyone who subsequently entered the cultivated fields of Florentine communal history would readily acknowledge an abiding obligation to that energetic surveyor, Davidsohn. Further, it was the efforts of this indefatigable scholar that freed the study of medieval Florentine history from the control of those who attempted to cover it with the gaudy flag of nineteenth-century patriotism or, even more damaging, to cast it in the mold of the racial myth emphasizing the antithesis between the blood of the Teuton and that of the Latin. Instead of following these flamboyant impulses, Davidsohn sought to create a rational framework. He stressed the role of material interests. There was of course abundant economic evidence on such questions as the rise and decline of the Florentine nobility or the weakening of Ghibelline ties and the strengthening of the Guelf union in Tuscany. He could argue effectively that the growing commercial bonds between Pope and Kingdom of Naples on the one hand and Florentine bankers and merchants on the other was a prime socioeconomic factor altering the features of the late Florentine medieval commune. When such an analysis is hardened into explanatory principle or methodological device, however, it can frequently lead to a superficial description of personal psychology and general culture. When Davidsohn regards the proclamation of the Jubilee Year of 1300 as an economic trick performed by a cynical Pope to the plaudits of a superstitious world, then his method is caricatured.[1]

[1] See E. Sestan, "Roberto Davidsohn e la sua storia di Firenze," for an extensive historiographical discussion of these questions. Published in the first volume of the Italian translation of Davidsohn's history (Florence: 1957), I, 19–48.

There is much that could be said concerning the many successes and the few failures of this monumental work, with its information-packed *Forschungen.* For present purposes it might be sufficient to indicate that Davidsohn was sometimes incapable of appreciating medieval values since he was steeped in nineteenth-century liberalism with its prejudice against the feudal nobility, scholasticism, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It was this unwavering commitment, in the opinion of a recent critic, Ernesto Sestan, that made his entry into the medieval realm of ideals and motives so difficult. Since his psychology was simplistic and ultrarational, this realm seemed to him rampant with superstition and not a little childlike. Lacking empathy for the medieval, his descriptions of Florentine culture tended sometimes to be replete with value judgments pronounced in editorial rhetoric. The failure to appreciate the emotions at the heart of an action occasionally made his writing into a catalogue of names and a listing of events. Thus his view of culture is that of a collector rather than an investigator, additive rather than interpretive. Finally, although he intended to continue his multivolume history through the Ciompi revolution (1382), his narrative concludes in 1329–30.

The dialectical explanations of Gaetano Salvemini in his several important works on Florentine history, written between 1896 and 1901, are far more penetrating than the jejune observations of Davidsohn. In fact, the latter soon utilized certain of these theories in the later volumes of his own *Geschichte von Florenz.* For Salvemini one of the fundamental postulates of communal political experience was the stern and inexorable contest between city and countryside. Rulers of the polis, urban industrialists, and bankers ruthlessly exploited the rural proprietors. Cruel tax burdens and a relentless program of restriction on the export of grain served to place staggering burdens upon the potential of the countryside. In his most celebrated work, *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1292* (Florence, 1899), Salvemini identifies those who wanted strict regulation of the grain trade as the *popolani grassi* of the city. They were also the formulators of the exploitive tributary system. This new haute bourgeoisie of Florence were arrayed against the great magnates of Tuscany, whose patrimony was largely invested in rural real estate. Further, he compartmentalizes the chivalric spirit and the mercantile environment, failing to see the extent to which they interpenetrate. Finally, this penchant for duality leads to the overly logical separation of the profane and the secular sacred in the medieval world. It is not surprising, therefore, that his description of the contest between church and state is a mechanical one. Like Davidsohn he opted for the rational psychology appropriate to men pursuing economic interests. So, too, he saw the intellectual struggles of the late Middle Ages as those of reasonable men against the minions of superstition. He, too, had an anticlerical bias.[2]

Although Salvemini's views on relations between city and *contado* were challenged by subsequent historians, especially his emphasis on exploitation, certain aspects of his position may be defensible. The question of the effect and indeed the extent of communal taxation on rural holdings remains worthy of exploration. Even more fundamental for modern scholars is his very early work on knighthood in Florence, *La dignità cavalleresca nel comune di Firenze* (Florence. 1896). This is a monograph that has continued to be influential from the time of the publication of Davidsohn's fourth volume of the *Geschichte* until the most

[2] Cf. also E. Sestan, "Salvemini Storico e Maestro," *Rivista Storica Italiana,* LXX (1958), 5–19.

recent articles of Enrico Fiumi, which have been appearing regularly in the *Archivio Storico Italiano* from 1957 to the present. However, this past year J. Hyde in his *Padua in the Age of Dante* (New York, 1966), while extensively utilizing *La dignità,* indicated that Salvemini failed to realize that after the mid-fourteenth century the tendency in Florence was for the commune itself to create distinct orders of knighthood. In this way chivalry was incorporated in the life of the polis. Such an observation is particularly relevant for my study, since one of the principal motifs of Volume Two will be the emergence of the Florentine commune as a force for conferring status and dignity on its citizens.

For the purpose of the present study, the numerous insights of A. Doren in his many works from *Die florentiner Wollentuchindustrie vom 14. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1901) to *Italienishe Wirtschaftageschichte* (Jena, 1934) can be reduced to the following general statement: The period from the late 1290's to the 1330's was one of transition and of oscillation between the political needs of the commune and the particularistic tendencies of the greater guilds. This most thorough of investigators into the mountains of guild records observes that commencing with the early 1330's, centralizing forces reduced guild autonomy until these corporate bodies became subordinate to the signory. From the vantage point of the present study, this observation could be substantiated if the date for this development were advanced by a single decade. In other words, it would be under the aegis of the popular government after 1343 that the favored treatment traditionally afforded the guilds was first challenged. Although Doren is not concerned with the reasons for the onset of this decline, his studies furnish ample evidence, especially from the statutes of the *arti,* of a connection between the intensification of political and economic crisis on the one hand and the start of the withering away of guild powers on the other.

Doren calls attention to the importance of the guilds for the formation of the Florentine Ordinances of Justice in 1293. He also underscores their role in public finance. He does not, however, indicate that in proportion to the total communal budget their contribution was moderate indeed. Doren's effort to integrate the life of the guilds into the over-all fabric of the late medieval-Renaissance world is particularly disturbing; by their very nature the guilds were restrictive and repressive. Therefore, how can he achieve a convincing affirmation of the general Burckhardtian views he professes? Much of his material challenges any bland acceptance of Burckhardtian notions of the liberation of the individual from medieval ties of obligation. Surely, the corporate guild was not the best mechanism for economic self-expression. Without attempting to probe this question further, it can be suggested that Doren's resolution is not altogether satisfactory. He would argue that the gap between theory and practice was so great that the individual guildsman could easily evade the rigors of the law.

The conclusions advanced by N. Rodolico in his *Il popolo minuto (1343–1378)* (Bologna, 1899), as well as in his *La democrazia fiorentina nel suo tramonto (1378–1382)* (Bologna, 1906), are less relevant to the present inquiry since they treat internal political developments after the mid-*trecento.* The fact remains, however, that the author was the first to study the history of the lower orders of Florentine society. Also, his sensitive treatment of the relationship between politics and medieval religious nonconformity is extremely suggestive. His harsh and able critic, G. Scaramella, focused attention upon the role of the *novi cives* in communal politics over the second half of the *trecento.* But unlike Rodolico he identified this new element only with the *nouveaux riches* rather than with the

offspring of workers and minor guildsmen. This he did in his important monograph, *Firenze allo scoppio del tumulto dei Ciompi* (Pisa, 1914). Both scholars saw the years after 1343 as the locus for the blossoming, ripeness, and final decay of democratic forms and impulses within the Arno republic. Neither was much concerned with depicting the culture and politics of the preceding interval or with describing the intellectual milieu of the democratic years. Likewise, there was little concern to distinguish the newcomers after 1343 from their earlier counterparts. R. Caggese, in his *Firenze della decadenza di Roma al risorgimento d'Italia* (3 vols.; Florence, 1912–21), displayed an understanding of the several historical interpretations then in vogue, incorporating in eclectic fashion some of the central hypotheses of scholars from Davidsohn through Rodolico. F. Schevill's *History of Florence from the Founding of the City through the Renaissance* (New York, 1936) presents the best general synthesis in English of the many divergent interpretations. As G. Brucker has suggested in the bibliographical essay in his extremely important recent work, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343–1378* (Princeton, 1962), both Caggese and Schevill tend to be overly influenced by Rodolico and therefore do not stress pre-1343 developments sufficiently.

Two noteworthy studies are P. Santini's *Studi sull'antica costituzione del Comune di Firenze* (Florence, 1901) and B. Barbadoro's *La finanza della repubblica fiorentina: Imposta diretta e debito publico fino all'istituzione del Monte* (Florence, 1929). Neither draws dramatic inferences from the materials. The former deals brilliantly with problems in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Florentine constitutional history. His approach is juridical, and his important delineation of issues has unfortunately not been amplified by subsequent inquiry. Barbadoro's work stands as the fundamental analysis of communal finance from the earliest documents through the formation of the funded communal debt at mid-*trecento*. My present study is deeply beholden to his compelling monograph. While Barbadoro is sometimes reluctant to generalize from his data, C. Paoli, in his *Della Signoria di Gualtieri Duca d'Atene in Firenze* (Florence, 1862), is not. He displays a moral aversion toward Brienne's tenure as an example of that form of signory which hampers the attempt of Florentines to respond to crisis by forming a more impersonal government.

It is only with the publication of the early writings of Nicola Ottokar and Armando Sapori that Florentine historiography takes a radical turn. Their scholarship has influenced contemporary interpretations in fields as varied as Dante studies, inquiries into art history, and investigations into the world of the *Decameron*. Beginning with his *Il Comune di Firenze alla fine del dugento* (Florence, 1926) and continuing through *Studi comunali e fiorentini* (Florence, 1948), Ottokar worked effectively to undermine generalizations on socioeconomic stratification that underlay the insights of Florentine historians from Davidsohn and Salvemini to Caggese. He deftly demonstrated the inadequacies of many of their conclusions but was not always able to furnish unifying hypotheses of his own. He denied any inexorable contest for political power between precisely determined socioeconomic groups, any systematic exploitation of rural wealth by the urban industrialists and bankers, and the exclusively aristocratic composition of the powerful Guelf party. Indeed, Ottokar found few striking differences between political sentiments of great magnates and those of high-born commoners as expressed during the many sessions of the governmental advisory councils. Skillfully, then, he discredited much that his hard-working predecessors had done by presenting a seemingly nonideological view of political behavior.

Ottokar's successor to the chair of history at the University of Florence justly lauds his incomparable writings.[3] And yet, says Sestan, his works reveal a tragic flaw of which the master himself was not unaware. On the one hand Ottokar recognizes that politicians of Dante's era were not blind to the possibilities of a just and peaceful civil life and the homage they paid to the ethos of the society through which they moved, though formal, was no less real. Moreover, he realizes that their world was replete with religious ritual and sacramental ties. Yet despite his tacit salute to the "associative impulse," Ottokar's political men act neither from economic interest nor cultural and ideological imperatives. In point of fact, concludes Sestan, Ottokar's men don't know where they are going or where they want to go. The reader feels only that he is witnessing a sterile struggle bereft of significance or development. What, in Sestan's opinion, is required is an effort to relate the "primordial instincts for political power," which are a historical constant, to the particulars of the moment, especially the need to justify one's acts to others as well as rationalize them to oneself.

The contribution of Ottokar remains formidable, even though in certain respects it is essentially negative. Sestan feels that his predecessor's writings fail to clarify the collective impulses to which Florentines of the age of Dante responded. Studies of art, literature, religious thought, and philosophy reveal that this was an epoch in which civic culture flourished. Such a renaissance of a polis had not occurred since the days of antique Greece and Rome. Sestan opines that Ottokar's inability to discern any ideals or even ideas underlying political behavior may have been due to the fact that he had selected too brief a period—just over a decade—for investigation. Possibly Ottokar was too concerned to criticize earlier scholarship. In any case, he did shatter those simplistic a priori notions about class conflict. No longer could historians rely on either a thesis-antithesis interpretation of the relationship between noble and commoner or between city and countryside.

It was the economic historian Armando Sapori who sought to depict the ideals and collective impulses that altered the goals and rationalizations of the Florentine merchant class in what he was to term "the heroic age of Florentine capitalism." "The Christian pilgrims"— the Acciaiuoli, Bardi, Frescobaldi, Peruzzi *et al.*, noble and commoner alike—responded to the religious and chivalric imperatives of the late Middle Ages. In a series of works, appropriately listed and discussed in his *Le marchand italien du moyen âge* (Paris, 1952), he considered the formal education and culture of the capitalist elite in Florence. Deftly he overturned Sombart's superficial analysis of the skills and sensitivities of this highly developed community of men who were called upon to finance far-flung enterprises and formulate intricate policies. Moreover, Sapori learned from Ottokar to avoid naive assertions concerning class or such simplistic formulas as irreducible antithesis between capitalist and agrarian society. Instead he presents the guild aristocrats with their diversified patrimonies and extensive rural holdings, manifesting both confidence and an abiding concern for Christian norms. Scholars of Italian literature, especially Vittore Branca in his *Boccaccio Medievale* (Florence, 1956), are particularly beholden to this economic historian who was the first to explore the values of late medieval society as they influenced the business and industrial orders in the Florentine polis.

There are two reservations concerning Sapori's numerous and valuable studies. He has a marked tendency to denigrate later *trecento* capitalism by comparison

[3] E. Sestan, "Nicola Ottokar," *ibid.*, LXXI (1959), 178–184.

with its earlier, heroic epoch. Such contrast is misleading especially since Sapori has done little work on the business community of the late *trecento*. Second, and more germane to the present study, he tends to utilize very superficial aspects of merchant life for the purpose of establishing the character of the business world. It is not that his inferences are incorrect but that the acts themselves are trivial. In other words, he does not attempt to describe the more serious and weighty elements in the religious psychology of the merchant world. Similarly, he indicates most inadequately the durable patriotic impulses of this class, making only bland statements about their abiding love for the *patria*. He makes no attempt to present an integrated view of the citizen merchant responding to the norms of everyday civic life. All this criticism pales, however, by comparison with the service he alone rendered by disproving facile class theories and naive economic determinist explanations. This he accomplished through an empathetic narrative of mercantile elitist sympathies for both the structure and the self-justifying values of the late medieval world.

One area still requiring analysis is that of style: the basic social and mental processes of which cultural institutions are the concrete manifestations or projections. Relationships among phenomena rather than the phenomena themselves must be studied. Crucial to this enterprise are the systems into which these relations are structured. Clearly, there is a need to relate the objective analysis of institutions to the subjective experience of individuals. History, then, concentrates upon organizing its data in accord with conscious expressions of social values.

From the foundation of *Année Sociologique* by Emile Durkheim to the writings of Claude Levi-Strauss—*Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963)—the French have dominated in that critical area where the socioeconomic and the psychological tend to merge. The question of how practical everyday activity assumes the status of a program for living is an essential one for those treating problems of style. How is this instinctual activity embossed and embellished until it becomes a creed? In what manner do the designs and actions of men conform to an ideal system? One of Ottokar's most able students, J. Plesner, in his *L'émigration de la campagne à la ville libre de Florence au XIII^e siècle* (Copenhagen, 1934), commenced a reconstruction of the history of relationships between city and countryside in late medieval Tuscany that presented a more integrated view of economic life and attendant values. With Plesner as with Sapori the concern was not conflict and exploitation but shared values and aspirations. It was the latter that lent style to the age and *Stand* to the individual. Urban life did not preclude traditional rural values any more than merchant activity gainsaid Christian imperatives.

Since Plesner's premature death, Italian historians from E. Fiumi to E. Conti have continued to subscribe to modes of inquiry already initiated by Ottokar, Sapori, and Plesner. Fiumi in his numerous publications, principally in the *Archivio Storico Italiano* from 1950 through 1959, and Conti in his series, not yet published in its entirety, appear to be conducting an analysis wherein systems of property and techniques of cultivation or production are considered as prime determinants of other "social facts." In turn, these social facts are regarded as psychological facts. While neither of these authors employs such constructs with any high order of self-consciousness, it would appear that they, like so many other contemporary historians, owe a sizable debt to the explicit methodology of the French school, from Marc Bloch—*Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale*

française (Paris, 1952)—to Georges Duby—*L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'Occident médiéval* (2 vols.; Paris, 1962). From these last we discover that men's ideas are embedded in the *ambiance sociale* and that a system of social classification comes into being "only by virtue of the ideas that men form of it." The search, then, is for enduring sets of social and cultural conditions. Primary for Bloch are the *liens de dépendance* which bind one man to another. Both historians shun the quest for the single cause or the unique in any guise and seek to describe the more pervasive substratum of socioeconomic life. Further, the intense search for origins or precursors has since diminished: the approach today once more emphasizes the study of structure and function.

In the work of Plesner there is a high order of insight in the Durkheim tradition, so expertly practiced by Marc Bloch. Perhaps this Dane intuited much that was to follow, for his studies revealed the inadequacy of prevailing interpretations based on "ties of obligation" among rural inhabitants. By close phenomenological inquiry he was also able to show the shortcomings of standard theories of immigration into the Florentine republic in the *dugento*. Finally, he demonstrated how critical rural political experience was for the Florentine immigrant and how strong the bonds between city and countryside. Recently, P. J. Jones in his "Florentine Families and Florentine Diaries in the Fourteenth Century," *Papers of the British School at Rome,* XXIV (1956), 183–205, has persuasively amplified the nexus between the emerging value system and the intimate interdependence between polis and countryside. The style of life most devoutly sought represented a graceful synthesis between rustic virtue and business probity.

Nicolai Rubinstein, also a student of Ottokar's, accepted the socioeconomic frame of a symbiotic relationship between city and *contado*. Likewise he rejected simplistic notions of causality predicated upon theories of class conflict. Instead he undertook the first systematic treatment of emerging Florentine historical consciousness in the later Middle Ages. Through the most fastidious reconstructions he was able to bring to the fore that loosely structured political theory that guided the rulers of Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In his "The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* V (1942), 198 *ff.*, he demonstrates that the start of political thought is always closely related to the awakening of interest in history. Previously scholars had neglected the political ideas of Italian city-states and concentrated upon theoretical writings on church or empire or the general nature of the state. Rubinstein traces the earliest indications of political ideology through a description of the first Florentine specimens of historical narrative. He also indicates how susceptible late medieval Florentine historiography was to the imperatives of a burgeoning imperialism. In his "Florence and the Despots," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 5th series, II (1952), 21–45, he reveals the extent to which *trecento* Arno political thought was influenced by everyday civic experiences. The citizen aversion for despotism, so characteristic of the polis, stemmed from confrontations with this exacting variety of rule.

Rubinstein's work on the emergence of communal art is also of prime significance. He seeks for correlations between the burgeoning claims of society and the profusion of didactic frescoes adorning the walls of new government buildings. Moreover, he discloses a close relationship between certain of these wall paintings and popularized political theory of the late Middle Ages. [See his "Political Ideas in Sienese Art," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* XXI (1958), 179–207.] The art historian Millard Meiss has been most intent upon presenting

a stylistic analysis of cultural developments in *trecento* Florence in the fields of painting, literature, and religious thought. Although the first is paramount for the author, his excursions into the others are always most illuminating. Moreover, his approach raises large-scale questions pertaining to the changing character of the Florentine artistic and intellectual milieu over the course of the fourteenth century. My inquiry into the documents of the pre-1348 era owes much to him. His understanding of stylistic problems leads him to characterize this age as one of "harmonious coordination," at least in the realm of painting. With the onset of the Black Death, this confident balance gave way to an "opposition between plane and space, and between line and mass." Painting after the mid-*trecento* expresses a "denial of the values of individuality," tending "to magnify the realm of the divine while reducing that of the human." Gone is the faith that sacred and profane can be successfully blended. The liturgical and the miraculous are now stressed at the expense of the "naturalistic" and "lyrical." Departed, too, is the intense participation in the realization of chivalric virtue and knightly elegance.

If any modest disclaimer can be entered against Meiss's interpretation, it is that he has overstressed the effect of the Black Death upon Florentine culture. Indeed, it would seem the hard-won "harmonious coordination" was beginning to disintegrate at least by the early 1340's. The dissipation of the energies of the movement he describes as "proto-humanism" appear more closely connected with the declining vitality of the communal patriciate—magnate and haute bourgeois alike.

A work of great relevance that can be examined with rare profit in conjunction with Meiss's writings is the justly celebrated *Boccaccio Medievale* (Florence, 1956) by Vittore Branca. This volume of literary history argues with cogency that the *Decameron,* while composed at mid-*trecento,* looks back to a cultural scene whose moral locus is the first decades of the fourteenth century. Further, Branca discloses that the earliest readers of the *Decameron* were the progeny of the early fourteenth-century patriciate from the circle of the magnate Cavalcanti and the haute bourgeoisie Acciaiuoli clans. Adding to the persuasive materials utilized by economic historians such as Sapori, Branca demonstrates Boccaccio's unstinting admiration and persistent sympathy for the merchant orders of Florentine society. Although these good burghers were not crowned and adorned with the finery of the chivalric cadre, yet they were rich in humanity and generosity. It was these Florentine merchants, the "veri conquistadores," who for Boccaccio were able both to teach and to learn from the knightly stratum. The career and writings of the youthful Boccaccio stand as a eulogy to this hopeful ideal. According to Branca the *Decameron* is grounded in the optimistic medieval ethos—which explains the role of the comic schema in structuring the narrative.

The moral itinerary of the *Decameron* progresses from a beginning "horribilis et fetidus" to an end "prosperus desiderabilis et gratus." The young Boccaccio subscribed with elegant brevity to the Thomistic and Dantesque conception of *Fortuna,* who is not the blind distributor of good and evil but rather the emissary of divine justice and providence. But these hopeful commitments and abstract schemes recede, and we are left with an obtrusive sense of everyday realities that conform to no moral schema or comic pattern. If the *Decameron* stands as a most esthetic domicile for the meeting of symbol and chronicle, episode and legend, it also marks the commencement of the devitalized heroic paradigm and faltering moral architecture. The dissolution of organizing metaphors is a signifi-

cant area for investigation by scholars concerned with cultural developments in Florence, particularly in the 1360's and 1370's. While there is evidence of dissolution in earlier decades, it does not become a leitmotiv of the arts until just after the mid-*trecento*. One can see its onset and development in the paintings of Taddeo Gaddi, whose life span encompasses both the earlier and later periods and who gradually abandoned Giotto's synthesis. Still very useful in this regard is R. Salvini's *L'arte di Agnolo Gaddi* (Florence, 1936).

Last in our bibliographical note but exceedingly rewarding are the many writings of the recently deceased German scholar, Erich Auerbach. [For extensive bibliography and an excellent discussion of secondary studies on Dante, see C. Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 195–282.] Auerbach's historical eye is rivalled by few literary historians, and while Dante remains in the foreground of his inquiries, his interpretations serve to illuminate the general north Italian scene during the declining Middle Ages. Like Branca, he seeks to delineate those ideal schema and moral designs that structure the most attractive literature of those times. For him, Dante is a tragic figure who subscribed generously and totally to the transcendental values of the decaying age. However, Dante is too conscientious a historian and too skilled an observer of men to believe that these values can actually obtain in the phenomenal world. Indeed, the poet witnesses only failing institutions and decadent spiritual forms. The transcendent ideals of the medieval world can no longer conceal the cluttered, disjointed political landscape; finally, man's earthly struggles occur on "this little threshing place." In his *Dante: Poet of the Secular World,* trans. R. Manheim (Chicago, 1961), Auerbach demonstrates that the artist cannot conceive of a mystical system outside of and unrelated to the realities of the historical process. Our spiritual destiny can only be understood in terms of our historical being.

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