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The Writing on the Wall: Visiting the Sala degli Imperatori in Foligno with Francesco Da Fiano as Literary Guide

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Abstract

Around 1411–1412 Ugolino III of Trinci, the signore of Foligno, commissioned Gentile da Fabriano to decorate the so-called “Sala degli Imperatori” with 20 larger than life images of Roman heroes. Each hero was accompanied by a Latin epigram, composed by the humanist poet Francesco da Fiano. Da Fiano was probably also the mastermind behind the iconographical programme as a whole, which served to legitimise the Trinci’s rule by forging ancient roots. This article asks how the room was supposed to be ‘read’ by its contemporary audience. How were visitors expected to walk around, take in the decorations, and reflect on their meaning? And by whom were they guided? To answer this question, I consider Da Fiano’s appropriation of the *Parade of Heroes* in Virgil’s *Aeneid* 6 which offered the main roadmap for visiting the room. Its relevance extends from the selection and order of the heroes to their relationship with Ugolino III Trinci and contemporary Foligno, as also to the conception of the space, the interaction between the characters and visitors, and between the different arts exemplified in the room, painting and poetry above all.

Keywords

Parade of Heroes – Literary spaces – Virgil’s *Aeneid* – Francesco da Fiano – ekphrasis – Uses of the Past – Ugolino III Trinci – Neo-Latin epigram – Paragone delle arti

1 Introduction

When Cesare Conti in 1583 visited the Sala degli Imperatori (also called Sala dei Giganti) in the Palazzo Trinci of Foligno, he noted down what he saw and read. In his account, today preserved in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, he mentions sixteen larger than life frescoes of Roman

heroes, describing what they looked like and transcribing as much as he could of the Latin epigrams that were painted underneath each of them.¹ At the beginning of the seventeenth century Conti's account was copied and supplemented by Lodovico Iacobilli, whose report has been preserved in a manuscript in the Biblioteca del Seminario di Foligno.²

Their accounts are interesting, for they give us an impression of how sixteenth and seventeenth-century visitors viewed this room which was decorated by Gentile da Fabriano in the first years of the fifteenth century (probably around 1411–1412), at the behest of Ugolino III of Trinci. We can deduce how they moved around the sala, what they found interesting, what they focused on in the images, and the importance they attached to the poetic texts.³ Thus we know, for example, that they entered the room at the shorter northeast side, from where they started looking at the frescoes, with the image of Marcus Cassius Scaeva immediately beside them, following the walls clockwise to end with Scipio Africanus [Figs. 6.1 and 6.2].

Their accounts are also particularly valuable because they give information about certain elements of the decoration of this room that have gone missing or been damaged. Moreover, they record the original place of the poem in praise of Pope Sixtus IV that was added to the ensemble between 1475 and 1478, on the side where they entered the room. Iacobilli was also the first to identify the author of this epigram as Giannantonio Campano, the fifteenth-century humanist poet to whom I was introduced in 1999 by Karl Enenkel, and to whom I subsequently dedicated my doctoral thesis and first monograph.⁴ Following the most recent restoration of the Palazzo, in 1999 this poem was repainted on the opposite wall, the shorter southwest side [Fig. 6.3].

At the same time, Conti and Iacobilli also missed some crucial elements of the original decoration, because they had already been damaged due to several architectural interventions. From the original series of twenty painted heroes,

1 BAV Barb. Lat. 5333, fols. 104 v–105 v. A full transcription in Messini A., “Documenti per la storia del Palazzo Trinci di Foligno. I. Gli epigrammi latini nella Sala degli Imperatori”, *Rivista d'arte* 24 (1942) 74–98.

2 Biblioteca del Seminario, Foligno Ms. A 11 5, fols. 181 r–183 v. A full transcription in Faloci Pulignani M., *Le arti e le lettere alla corte dei Trinci. Ricerche storiche* (Foligno: 1888) 136–145; and Salmi M., “Gli affreschi del Palazzo Trinci a Foligno”, *Bolettino d'arte* 9–12 (1919) 139–180 (esp. 176–180).

3 See Guerrini R., “Uomini di pace e di guerra che l'aurea Roma generò. Fonti antiche e tradizione classica negli epigrammi di Francesco Da Fiano per la Sala degli Imperatori. Anthologia Latina, Riese, 1906, 831–855d”, in Benazzi G. – Mancini F.F. (eds.), *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno* (Perugia: 2001) 375–400. Guerrini intersperses his discussion of the poems with several quotations from Conti's and Iacobilli's accounts.

4 See Guerrini, “Uomini di pace” 376 n. 15. My work on Campano appears in Beer S. de, *The Poetics of Patronage. Poetry as Self-Advancement in Giannantonio Campano* (Turnhout: 2013).



FIGURE 6.1 The Sala degli Imperatori in Palazzo Trinci, Foligno, viewed from the southwest
IMAGE © MARTIJN JEBBINK

four are missing from their accounts (Pompey, Trajan, Romulus and Caesar): ‘qui mancano figure per fenestra fatta’.⁵ With regard to other heroes, they only saw (part of) the image but were unable to record the adjoining poem (Augustus, Torquatus and Cincinnatus). Neither did they know the name of the author of these poems. Last but not least, it seems that the programmatic poem that was meant to open the visit had already gone missing when they visited the room:

Riese, *Anth.* 831

Quisquis ad ista moves fulgentia limina gressus,
Priscorum hic poteris venerandos cernere vultus.
Hic pacis bellicque viros, quos aurea quondam
Roma tulit celoque pares dedit inclita virtus.
Grandia si placent tantorum gesta virorum,
pasce tuos inspectu oculos et singula lustra.⁶

5 Biblioteca del Seminario, Foligno Ms. A II 5, fol. 181v. Iacobilli added the missing epigrams on fols. 204v–205v, possibly based on another humanist collection, though without the programmatic opening poem; see Guerrini, “Uomini di pace” 392.

6 Quoted in Guerrini, “Uomini di pace” 375.

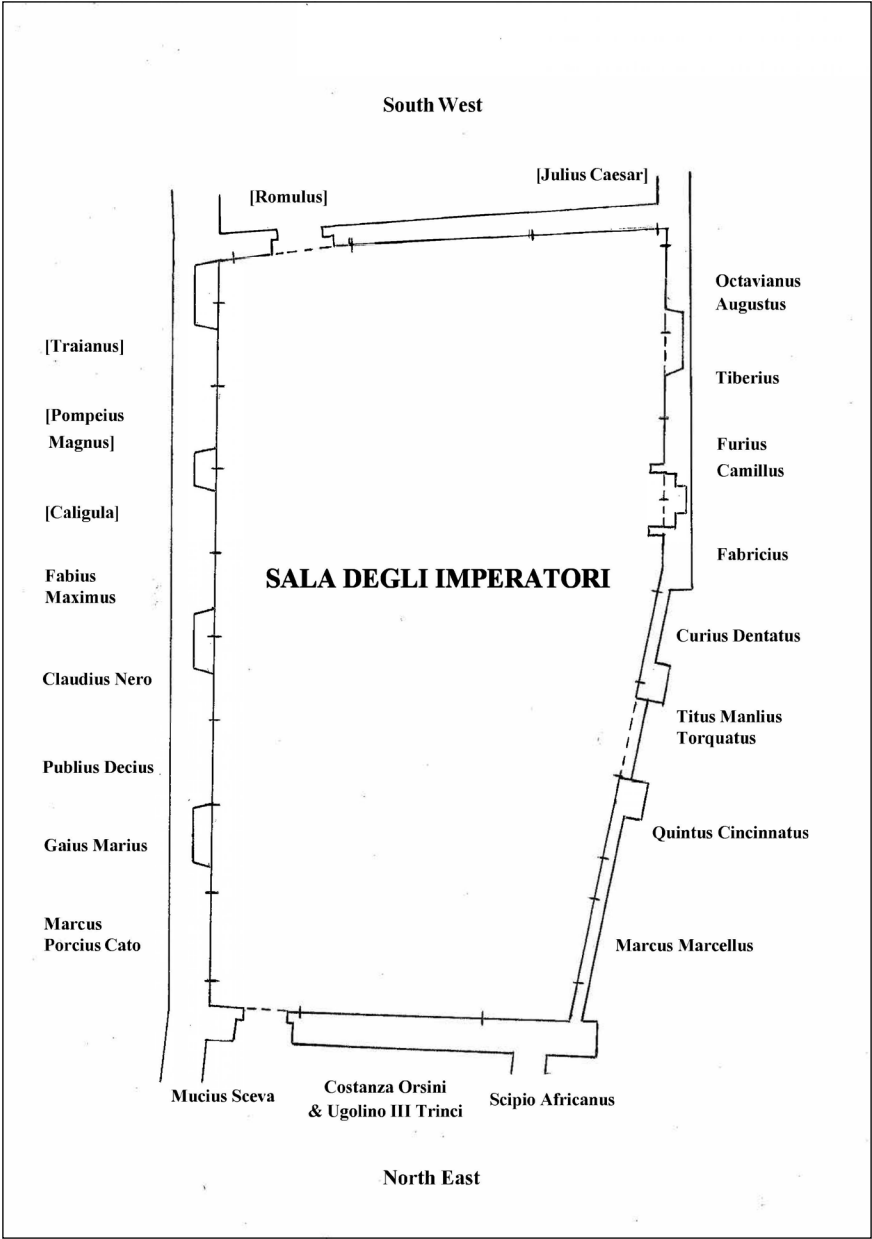


FIGURE 6.2 Map of the Sala degli Imperatori, drawn by S. de Beer, based on a design by D. Pasquale in Galassi, *Il Palazzo Trinci* 8–9. Heroes whose names are between brackets [...] are not visible anymore but were probably represented in this position



FIGURE 6.3 Poem by Giannantonio Campano in praise of Pope Sixtus IV, originally painted in the Sala degli Imperatori between 1475 and 1478, and repainted in 1999

IMAGE © MARTIJN JEBBINK

Whoever you are who moves his steps to these shining entryways, you can discern here the admirable faces of the ancients, here the men of peace and war, whom Golden Rome once bore forth, and whom celebrated virtue has rendered equal to heaven. If the great deeds of such great men please you, feast your eyes and review them one by one.

This poem reveals the design of the room as a whole, giving a rationale for the selection of heroes shown: they were meant to be ancient Romans known for their virtue, both in war and peace. It also indicates how visitors were supposed to move about, reviewing the deeds of these great men one by one. Moreover, as we will soon see, the poem also gives some important clues about the main literary models on which the room's design was based.

This poem is known to us today because, like most of the poems painted in the Sala degli Imperatori, it was transmitted separately in various manuscript collections, and ultimately ended up in the *Anthologia Latina* edited by A. Riese in 1906.⁷ Since this poem always appears as the opening poem in these

7 Riese A., *Anthologia Latina* (Leipzig, 1906) 831–855d. Guerrini, “Uomini di pace” 392 gives an overview of the manuscript transmission.

collections, it seems logical to assume that it, too, must have been painted in the room. Most scholars assume that it was visible directly upon entering, or just outside of the entrance.⁸ I would suggest that it was probably situated in the same place where Conti and Iacobilli recorded Campano's poem in praise of Sixtus IV; it thus likely went missing sometime between 1475 and 1478, when Campano's poem replaced it.⁹

However, this poem came to be known, along with the transmission history of the other poems, only relatively recently. For it was in 1911 that Ludwig Bertalot identified these poems in the *Anthologia Latina* as humanist in origin.¹⁰ He was also the first to identify the author as Francesco da Fiano (c.1350–1421), a prolific humanist writer closely connected to several centres of (papal and secular) power during his lifetime.¹¹ Subsequently, based on his findings, the epigrams in the Sala degli Imperatori were for the first time, definitively, attributed to Da Fiano.

Roberto Guerrini's studies of Da Fiano's poems have proved integral to the interpretation of the Sala degli Imperatori in the larger context of the Palazzo Trinci.¹² With the ultimate goal of preparing a critical edition and commentary, he studied their textual transmission, analysed their stylistic features,

8 E.g., Messini, "Documenti" 84: 'Iscritto nell'atrio della sala o nel salone parallelo, detto di Sisto IV'. However, this would suggest that the main entrance was located in the longer northwest wall (as it is now); my assumption is that it was originally in the shorter northeast wall. At least, that seems to be where Conti and Iacobilli entered the room. For the (re)construction of the Palazzo, see L. Lametti, "Il palazzo: dalle preesistenze all'Unità d'Italia", in G. Benazzi – F.F. Mancini (eds.), *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno* (Perugia: 2001), 51–104.

9 Since Cesare Conti introduces the image of Marcus Cassius Scaeva as *next to* ('da canto') the poem by Campano, we could even hypothesise that this opening poem was painted on the northeast wall between Scaeva and Scipio Africanus, below Ugolino III Trinci and Costanza Orsini.

10 Bertalot L., "Humanistisches in der *Anthologia Latina*", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie. Neue Folge* 66 (1911) 56–80.

11 See Bachelli F., "Francesco Da Fiano", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 49 (1997).

12 Besides the already cited "Uomini di pace", works by Roberto Guerrini include: "Anthologia Latina 831–855d. Per un'edizione critica degli epigrammi di Francesco Da Fiano", *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, 20/21 (1988) 329–342; idem, "I venerati volti degli antichi. Gli epigrammi di F. nel salone dei Trinci a Foligno", in *Signorie in Umbria tra Medioevo e Rinascimento: L'esperienza dei Trinci. Atti Del Convegno (Foligno 1986)* (Perugia: 1989) 459–467; "L'arte figurativa 1. I venerati volti degli antichi. Virgilio e i cicli umanistici degli uomini famosi", in Cavallo G. – Fedeli P. – Giardina A. (eds.), *Lo spazio letterario di Roma Antica IV. L'attualizzazione del testo*, (Roma: 1991) 263–306; idem, "Cernere vultus. La galleria degli eroi di Virgilio e la tradizione ecfrastica nella Sala degli Imperatori di Palazzo Trinci a Foligno", in Caleca A. – Toscano B. (eds.), *Palazzo Trinci. Nuovi studi sulla pittura tardogotica* (Livorno: 2009) 49–64.

and identified the most important ancient and contemporary literary sources. Virgil and Lucan figure most prominently, but there are also close parallels with the work of Dante, Petrarch and Federico Frezzi, a contemporary poet from Foligno.¹³

These philological studies have contributed in turn to a better understanding of the decorative scheme's ideological message, the meaning of the specific heroes, and their connection to the Trinci.¹⁴ They have also contributed to the study of other fresco cycles in the Palazzo Trinci: the Loggia di Romolo, the Room of the Liberal Arts, and the Hall with the Nove Prodi.¹⁵ Likewise, the painted cycle of 'famous men' in the Sala degli Imperatori has been compared to similar cycles created in this period. Among these, the one at the court of Francesco Il Vecchio da Carrara in Padova (now lost), based on Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, was the most prominent.¹⁶ Da Fiano played a central role at the court of Ugolino III Trinci, providing a crucial connection with contemporary humanist networks, as well as with the papal court. All this has led to a convincing reconstruction of how an upcoming and ambitious Signoria, with a complicated connection to papal power, commissioned writers and artists to conceptualise and visualise a compelling narrative, and to legitimize their rule by forging ancient roots.¹⁷

This article, rather than offering a novel interpretation, will ask how contemporary visitors to the Sala degli Imperatori saw and understood the ensemble. For even studies that integrate the frescoes and the poems treat the room

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- 13 Also recorded in Enenkel K.A.E. – Ottenheim K., *Ambitious Antiquities, Famous Forebears. Constructions of a Glorious Past in the Early Modern Netherlands and in Europe* (Leiden – Boston: 2019) 14–15.
 - 14 Galassi C., "La Sala dei Giganti di Palazzo Trinci. Iconologia di un ciclo politico", *Bollettino storico della città di Foligno* 14 (1990) 155–82; Revest C. – Delzant J.-B., "L'artiste, le savant et le politique. Gentile Da Fabriano et Francesco Da Fiano au service d'Ugolino Trinci, Seigneur de Foligno (début du XVe siècle)", *Questes* 17 (2009) 24–51.
 - 15 Galassi C., "Un signore e il suo palazzo. Iconografia, cronologia e committenza dei cicli pittorici nelle 'case nuove' di Ugolino Trinci", in Benazzi G. – Mancini F.F. (eds.), *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno* (Perugia: 2001) 269–298; Lai P., "Alla corte dei Trinci. La cultura al servizio del Signore", in Benazzi – Mancini (eds.), *Il Palazzo Trinci* 195–216; Laureti E., "Il ciclo decorativo negli edifici trinciani e Il 'Quadriregio' di Federico Frezzi", *Bollettino storico della città di Foligno* 29/30 (2008) 71–86.
 - 16 Donato M.M., "Gli eroi romani tra storia ed 'exemplum'. I primi cicli umanistici di uomini famosi", in Settis S. (ed.), *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte Italiana, Vol. II: I generi e i temi ritrovati* (Turin: 1985) 137–138.
 - 17 Well summarized in Galassi C., *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno* (Perugia: 2005) and recently further developed by Robert S., *Shaping a New Identity for the Trinci Signoria. Ambition and Image-Making in the Early Quattrocento Court of Foligno* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Open University: 2022).

as if it gives away its meaning 'in a single glance'. On the contrary, the room's design in multiple media invited viewers to engage with it in a more dynamic fashion. This article therefore aims at discerning how the room was supposed to be 'read'. How were visitors expected to walk around, take in the decorations, and reflect on their meaning? And by whom were they guided?

In thus reconstructing the experience of visiting the Sala degli Imperatori, I agree with Cristina Galassi in considering Francesco Da Fiano as the mastermind of the design as a whole.¹⁸ I assume that he selected the heroes, decided on their order, and composed the Latin epigrams to be painted underneath. The extent to which he also had a say in the exact iconography or style of the frescoes is difficult to determine, but I do assume that he was at least involved in deciding on some general features, such as the way the heroes were placed in the room, or the layout of the poems on the wall.

Moreover, in making this reconstruction I consider the intertextual references to earlier literature in Da Fiano's poems, not just as building blocks for his texts but as possible keys to unlocking the structural logic of the whole room, including the position of the images in space. What sort of viewing experience might Da Fiano have envisaged? Specifically, I believe it worthwhile to take a closer look at Da Fiano's appropriation of the *Parade of Heroes* in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6. This passage has already been widely acknowledged as one of the main literary models for Da Fiano's poetry, but my point will be that it also offers the main roadmap for visiting the room.¹⁹ Its relevance extends from the selection and order of the heroes to their relationship with Ugolino III Trinci and contemporary Foligno, the conception of the space, the interaction between the characters and visitors, and finally, to the interaction between the different arts represented in the room, above all between painting and poetry.

2 The Sala degli Imperatori and Virgil's *Parade of Heroes*

In order to understand Da Fiano's appropriation of Virgil's *Parade of Heroes*, we should first briefly revisit the most important aspects of this passage. In *Aeneid* 6, Aeneas lands in Italy and visits the Underworld in the presence of the Sibyl of Cumae; here he meets the shade of his recently deceased father Anchises. When he distinguishes a group of shades far away, Anchises explains that these shades will become his progeny, the future heroes of Rome. As they sit down together on a small rise, the shades process by them, and Anchises

¹⁸ Galassi, "Un signore" 279.

¹⁹ Above all in Guerrini, "Cernere vultus".

explains one by one whom he and Aeneas see, describes what they look like, and predicts the deeds for which they will become famous.²⁰

Why is this passage considered an important model for Da Fiano? Two things stand out. First, the phrase Virgil uses to introduce the Parade of Heroes shows some striking similarities to the phrase with which Da Fiano introduces the images in the Sala degli Imperatori. Note especially the similarity between *discere vultus* in Virgil and *cernere vultus* in Da Fiano (see above, verse 2):²¹

Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.752–755
 Dixerat Anchises natumque unaque Sibyllam
 Conventus trahit in medios turbamque sonantem
 Et tumulum capit unde omnis longo ordine posset
 Adversos legere et venientum discere vultus.

Anchises paused and drew his son and with him the Sibyl into the heart of the assembly and buzzing throng, then chose a mound whence he might scan face to face the whole of the long procession and note their faces as they came.²²

Second, it is the order of the heroes – especially the first three – that marks an important connection between the Sala degli Imperatori and Virgil's Parade of Heroes. For Virgil has the Roman heroes appear in a rather peculiar order: he starts with Romulus, Julius Caesar, and Augustus, and then returns to earlier heroes, who, chronologically speaking, should be placed between Romulus and Caesar. Da Fiano does a similar thing: he also starts with Romulus, Julius Caesar, and Augustus. However, before directly returning to earlier heroes, he first inserts Tiberius, the emperor who directly succeeded Augustus. Then he stages, in the following order, Furius Camillus, Fabricius, Manius Curius Dentatus, Titus Manlius Torquatus, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, Marcus Marcellus, Scipio Africanus, Marcus Cassius Scaeva, Marcus Porcius Cato, Gaius Marius, Publius Decius, Claudius Nero and Fabius Maximus. Only the last three Romans – Caligula, Pompey the Great, and Trajan – are more recent than Caesar and Augustus.

20 On the Parade of Heroes, see Virgil, *Aeneid* 6, ed. – trans., N. Horsfall, 2 vols. (Berlin – Boston: 2014) 510–608.

21 Guerrini, “Cernere vultus” 63 n. 7 identifies the precise words in Petrarch's *Africa* 6.647.

22 Text and translation from Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid* 1–6, trans. H.R. Fairclough – G.P. Goold (Cambridge MA: 1999).

It is generally acknowledged that this peculiar order in Virgil's Parade of Heroes serves to emphasise the genealogical link between Aeneas and Augustus, the main addressee of Virgil's epic. Did Da Fiano have a similar goal in mind, and if so, how could this have worked in his specific context? Part of the answer lies in the observation that the order in which the heroes are represented in the Sala degli Imperatori is different from the order of Da Fiano's poems as transmitted in the *Anthologia Latina*. It is also different from the order in which these same heroes were included in Petrarca's *De viris illustribus*, which is generally acknowledged as the Da Fiano's main source [Table 6.1]. It is regularly emphasised that 17 out of the 20 heroes in Foligno overlap with heroes in Petrarca, but no one has noticed, as far as I know, that they are represented in a completely different order.²³ However, I believe that this difference is crucial, for it reveals how Da Fiano's plans for the Sala degli Imperatori developed and draws attention to some of the peculiarities of the cycle that resulted.

TABLE 6.1 Order of *Famous Men in Petrarch and Two Versions of Da Fiano*

Petrarca – <i>De viris illustribus</i>	Da Fiano – Anth. Latina RIESE	Da Fiano – Sala degli Imperatori
	831 Intro	831 Intro
Romulus	832 Romulus	832 Romulus
Numa Pompilius		
Tullius Hostilius		
Ancus Martius		
Iunius Brutus		
Horatius Cocles		
Cincinnatus	833 Q. Cincinnatus	855d Caesar
Camillus	834 Camillus	851 Augustus
Torquatus	835 Titus Manlius Torquatus	Tiberius
Valerius Corvus		
Publius Decius	836 Publius Decius	834 Camillus
Papirius Cursor		
Curius Dentatus	837 Curius Dentatus	838 Fabricius
Fabricius	838 Fabricius	837 Curius Dentatus
Alexander		
Pyrrhus		
Hannibal		

23 Galassi, *Il palazzo Trinci* 79, among others, emphasises the large overlap with Petrarch's text.

TABLE 6.1 Order of Famous Men in Petrarch and Two Versions of Da Fiano (*cont.*)

Petrarca – De viris illustribus	Da Fiano – Anth. Latina RIESE	Da Fiano – Sala degli Imperatori
Fabius Maximus	839 Fabius Maximus	835 Titus Manlius Torquatus
Marcus Marcellus	840 Claudius Nero	833 Q. Cincinnatus
Claudius Nero	841 Marcus Marcellus	841 Marcus Marcellus
Livius Salinator		
Scipio Africanus	842 Scipio Africanus	Scipio Africanus
	843 Gaius Marius	844 Scaeva
	844 Scaeva	846 Cato
	845 Pompeius	843 Gaius Marius
Cato	846 Cato	836 Publius Decius
Julius Caesar	847 Caesar	840 Claudius Nero
	848 Caesar	839 Fabius Maximus
	849 Caesar	Caligula
	850 Caesar	845 Pompeius
	851 Augustus	854 Trajanus
	852 Augustus	
	853 Tiberius	
	854 Trajanus	
	855 Augustus	
	855a Pyrrhus	
	855b Alexander	
	855c Caesar	
	855d Caesar	
Titus Flaminius		
Antiochus		
Scipio Nasica		
Lucius Aemilius Paulus		
Caecilius Metellus		
Scipio Aemilianus		
Gaius Marius		
Pompeius		
Augustus		
Vespasianus		
Titus		
Trajanus		

Based on this observation, I hypothesise that Da Fiano first started to create a poetic gallery of heroes based on Petrarch, which forms the basis of the collection we now find in Riese. This was basically, as it was in Petrarch, a collection of heroes presented in chronological order, starting with Romulus.²⁴ He subsequently adapted his collection to align it with the Virgilian template. To this purpose he made, above all, considerable changes to the order: just like Virgil he put Romulus, Julius Caesar, and Augustus first, and reshuffled the other heroes to create more thematic groups rather than adhering to a strictly chronological order.²⁵ At this point he probably also made some other alterations to his original collection of heroes; these changes do not seem primarily linked to the Virgilian template but might be better explained by reference to the multimedia ensemble he had in mind, combining text, image, and architectural space.²⁶

My assumption is that he adapted his plans along the way for two main reasons: in order to create a closer connection between the Roman heroes in the room and the Trinci, especially Ugolino III Trinci, thus to create a more profoundly ideological narrative, analogous to the one Virgil created in praise of Augustus. And second, he used the Sala degli Imperatori to consider the relative merits of the different arts, emphasising his role as literary guide by interacting with Virgil in a metaliterary way.

24 Tiberius, Marcus Cassius Scaeva, and Caligula do not figure in Petrarch. Interestingly, Da Fiano's collection in Riese is even more 'correct' than Petrarch in this respect, as he inserted in the right chronological order some heroes added to Petrarch's collection by Lombardo della Seta (e.g., Gaius Marius, see Table 6.1). Guerrini, "Uomini di pace" and "Cernere vultus" discuss the rationale for some of the divergences between Petrarch and the Sala degli Imperatori.

25 See Guerrini, "Cernere vultus" 52 for a discussion of the order as represented in the Sala degli Imperatori. It should be noted that not all mss. collections with Da Fiano's poems present them in the same chronological order as Riese, but neither do they exactly follow the order of the frescoes in Foligno.

26 For Julius Caesar he selected an epigram that is transmitted at the end of Riese (855d); for Tiberius and Scipio Africanus he used (composed?) altogether different poems; Caligula did not figure in the earlier collection at all. The poems selected for Caesar and Augustus have some exceptional features, as we shall see, and may have been composed specifically for use in this room. The poem selected for Scipio Africanus has a limited mss. circulation in combination with a poem for Scipio Aemilianus, among others at the end of a manuscript with Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Ross. 526, fol. 93 r). See Bertalot, *Humanistisches* 75. Interestingly, the 'new' poems are longer than the others, which all count six verses. I find this difficult to explain, just as I do not have an explanation for why many of the boxes in which the epigrams are painted seem too large for them.

In what follows I will further develop these arguments, asking how Da Fiano appropriated Virgil to serve his own purposes, and how this helps us understand the way in which he envisaged the sala would be 'read' and 'visited'. I will consider the selection of heroes and their connection to the Trinci, the conception of space, and the experience of moving through it with Da Fiano as literary guide. I will conclude by reflecting on the importance of the layout of the texts on the wall.

3 Da Fiano's Roman Heroes and Augustan Trinci

Even if the ensemble of heroes in the Sala degli Imperatori has a clear connection to the Parade of Heroes in Virgil, there are also numerous differences: the room is far from a painted version of Virgil's text. Many of the heroes present in Virgil are missing in Foligno, but Da Fiano also includes some heroes that are missing in Virgil. In his various articles Roberto Guerrini has discussed several of these absences and presences, and proposed compelling reasons for them.²⁷ Here I only want to underline two differences of a more general nature and their relevance for understanding the connection between Da Fiano's heroes and the Trinci.

Unlike Virgil, Da Fiano did not include any hero who could be placed chronologically between Aeneas and Romulus. Whereas Virgil also added a series of Alban Kings, Da Fiano started his series from the foundation of Rome onwards. This can be explained by the fact that his first model, Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, also started with Romulus. However, it also fits very well into the contemporary narrative concerning the origins of Foligno and of the Trinci family, as they specifically traced their origins back to Romulus. This explains his omnipresence in the rest of the Palazzo, above all in the Loggia di Romolo, but also as the first among the Nove Prodi. True, the Trinci also had, like so many families in this era, a Trojan genealogy, which links them to the Trojan Tros, but this story was far less developed.²⁸ Their focus was squarely on Rome, not on Troy, and in any case not on Aeneas. Even if, via the Virgilian template, Aeneas is implicitly omnipresent in the sala, he is actually surprisingly absent.

²⁷ Guerrini, "Cernere vultus" 53.

²⁸ See Lai, "Alla corte dei Trinci". For the Trinci's connection with Troy, see Picchiarelli V, "Prima di Gentile. Alcune ipotesi sui monocromi della Loggia Nova, l'identità di Paolo Nocchi e l'attività di Francesco Da Fiano", in Caleca A. – Toscano B. (eds.), *Palazzo Trinci. Nuovi studi sulla pittura tardogotica* (Livorno: 2009) 161–189.

On the other end, Da Fiano also adds some Romans more recent than Augustus: Tiberius, Caligula, and Trajan. Tiberius' presence might be explained by the example of Lucan, but it is nevertheless interesting that Da Fiano used another poem in the Sala than the one we find in Riese.²⁹ Caligula is a complete newcomer, also in comparison with Riese, and he is also an outlier in that he functions as a negative example. The inclusion of Trajan seems to be connected to his crucial role in spreading the *imperium romanum*, a feat that Virgil ascribed chiefly to Augustus. In fact, Da Fiano's epigram for Trajan alludes to this same passage in Virgil.³⁰

Their inclusion can be explained by the fact that Da Fiano, unlike Virgil, was able to go beyond Augustus in his selection of heroes. At the same time, having observed that Da Fiano's selection cleaves closely to Roman Antiquity, and very closely to the Virgilian core, we may still wonder what these Roman heroes actually meant to Ugolino III Trinci; why were they still considered relevant in offering praise and legitimisation to the ruler of Foligno some 1400 years later. To answer this question, we need to focus on the way Virgil connected the Parade of Heroes to Augustus, and to what extent Da Fiano used a similar strategy to connect them to his patron, Ugolino III Trinci.

Virgil embeds the Parade of Heroes in the narrative of the *Aeneid* as a vision of the future: Anchises introduces them to the protagonist Aeneas as his future progeny. However, on a metaliterary level this passage also represents Virgil praising Augustus by showing him, and his audience, his (divine) forefathers and prestigious ancestry. Augustus is thus 'present' in the Parade of Heroes twice: both as a *character* / *hero* taking part in the Parade, and as the *addressee* / *reader* watching the Parade, and recognising in it his own forefathers.

We can discern a similar double presence of Ugolino III Trinci in the Sala degli Imperatori as well. He is very explicitly represented as the prime 'visitor' or 'reader' of the sala, standing together with his wife on the balcony painted at the shorter northeast side, where one enters the room [Fig. 6.4]. As a 'second Augustus', he watches the Parade being presented for his benefit. But Ugolino is also, like Augustus in the *Aeneid*, represented as a character taking part in the Parade himself. For it is widely recognised that the painted figure of Augustus also represents Ugolino [Fig. 6.5]. This identification has been proposed, among other things, because he is the only figure seated on a throne, and the only one looking straight at the viewer, whereas all other figures are looking at each other. In my view this identification is further strengthened by the beginning of the epigram belonging to this image, which is also unique compared to the epigrams dedicated to the other heroes:

29 Guerrini, "Uomini di pace" 377 instead of Riese *Anth.* 853.

30 Guerrini, "Uomini di pace" 389–390 (= *Anth.* 854).



FIGURE 6.4
Gentile da Fabriano,
*Ugolino III Trinci and his
wife Costanza Orsini*
IMAGE © MARTIJN
JEBBINK

Riese, *Anth.* 851, “Octavianus Augustus”
Que mihi sancta dabit grandes depromere laudes
Musa tuas? Iam pauca canam. [...] ³¹

Which sacred Muse will give me the power to utter your great praises?
I will sing a few things.

This is the only poem in which Da Fiano speaks in the first person. The other first-person verbs in the collection are spoken in the voice of the hero-character. In this poem, however, Da Fiano presents himself as a poet who, after invoking the Muses, sings the praises of this particular hero, Octavianus Augustus, whom he addresses in the second person. Although Augustus is not the only

³¹ Guerrini, “Uomini di pace” 376.



FIGURE 6.5
Gentile da Fabriano,
Octavianus Augustus
IMAGE © SUSANNA
DE BEER

hero addressed in the second person, given the unique combination of this usage with Da Fiano's explicit reference to himself as a/the poet, it is very probable that the epigram not only celebrates Augustus but also Ugolino as the contemporary embodiment of Augustus.

We can thus assume that the specific praise of Augustus in this poem can also to a certain extent be read as praise of Ugolino. And since the main theme is that of 'peace after (civil) war', we may take this as one of the respects in which Da Fiano meant to praise in Ugolino, that is, his conferment of stability on the region. This also fits in with the general theme of the Parade of Heroes that presents all 'men of war and peace'. But if we look beyond this specific image, we can also discern other elements in the room's design that allowed Da Fiano to present Ugolino as the 'the New Augustus'.

Generally speaking, the imagery of Ugolino (or any other prince) as ‘the New Augustus’ hinges on two types of connection: on the one hand, the analogy between Augustus’ behaviour and Ugolino’s; on the other, Ugolino’s claim to be the legitimate ‘successor’ to Augustus. The first connection belongs to the dimension of ‘exemplarity’, while the second pertains to the dimension of ‘genealogy’, or should be understood within the framework of the *translatio imperii* (transfer of power).³² I would argue that both dimensions are present in the room, not just within the Parade but also in the Parade’s analogies to Ugolino, and contemporary Foligno; the figure of Augustus is central to all this.

In the opening poem the heroes are introduced as the ‘products’ of *aurea Roma* and *inclita virtus*: they are the progeny of Rome and of virtue. It is not difficult to see this as one single source encompassed by the concept of *romanitas* (romanness), a term that denotes the Romans’ supposedly unique virtue. However, if we think about Augustus, and how the *Aeneid* legitimises his rule, it is not just his exemplary *romanitas* but also his divine ancestry that brings him – and Rome – to their deserved hegemony over the world. And just as Virgil’s *Parade of Heroes* leading up to Augustus integrates these two dimensions, so does the Sala degli Imperatori.

For on the one hand, along the lines of ‘exemplarity’, all the heroes in the room are presented as moral ‘exempla’: models for virtuous behaviour to be followed (or not followed in the case of Caligula), or at least to be pondered.³³ And they presumably functioned like this not just for Ugolino but for all visitors, before whose eyes Ugolino explicitly appeared as a hero in Roman guise. This dimension is timeless in that it assembles into one space exempla from different time periods, displaying them together for the viewer’s benefit. Their specific historical context is not strictly relevant, and this may explain why Da Fiano’s design, from Tiberius onwards, shows no strict chronological order.³⁴

In the dimension of ‘genealogy’ or ‘succession’, on the other hand, chronology is an important factor, because it provides the crucial link between the

32 For these strategies, see Enenkel – Ottenheim, *Ambitious Antiquities*; and Beer S. de, *The Renaissance Battle for Rome: Competing Claims to an Idealized Past in Humanist Latin Poetry* (Oxford: 2024), esp. ch. 2.

33 On exemplarity in ancient Rome, also relevant for this context, see Langlands R., *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: 2018); and Roller M.B., *Models from the Past in Roman Culture: A World of Exempla* (Cambridge: 2018). In line with Langlands’ argument, Robert, “Shaping a New Identity”, posits that the *exempla* in the room are not univocally positive but rather are conversation pieces. See also Hankins J., *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge MA – London: 2019).

34 On the timeless dimension of the room, see Revest – Delzant, “L’artiste” 36.

prestigious Roman past and the present, and thereby legitimises current power structures. The room's 'temporal' dimension is explicitly represented, albeit in 'condensed' form, via the initial succession from Romulus, via Julius Caesar to Augustus. However, there are hints that the theme of succession can also be extended or, better, extrapolated as the continuation of this 'divinely' sanctioned power from Rome to fifteenth-century Foligno, through the addition of later emperors such as Tiberius and Trajan, and also by placement of Ugolino in the position of Augustus surveying the Parade as if it consists of his forefathers, too.³⁵

Integrating both dimensions presents a challenge, especially for a writer: Virgil exploits the potential of the Underworld to expand the temporal scope of his poem: it enables him to play with time and even invert it by presenting as future to Aeneas what is the past for his readers.³⁶ On the other hand it offers him a time-free zone in which he can bring a long line of heroes from Roman history together in the same literary space, which would not have been possible in a regular narrative sequence. But how did Da Fiano deal with the same challenge?

4 The Sala degli Imperatori as a Literary Space

In designing the Sala degli Imperatori, Da Fiano did not operate under the same narrative restrictions as had Virgil as a writer: he could easily depict all the Roman heroes in the same space. At the same time, for understanding the temporal (or chronological) dimension of the iconography, it was crucial that visitors had some idea about what kind of space they were entering. In this section of my essay, I investigate how Da Fiano, when it came to the spatial and visual aspect of his design, did not restrict himself to Virgil's Parade of Heroes but also took his inspiration from other literary spaces in Virgil's *Aeneid*, as well as from other physical spaces with similar traits, that is, spaces where the past was made visible to the visitor.

Actually, there are several hints in Da Fiano's opening poem that connect his design explicitly to other Virgilian spaces that were also visited by Aeneas.³⁷

35 This idea of succession and 'transfer of power' in connection with the Trinci is more explicitly present in the *Quadriregio* by Federico Frezzi, on which, see Lai, "Alla corte dei Trinci".

36 Virgil used other strategies to the same end in book 8, in the episodes of Aeneas' walk through 'future' Rome guided by Evander, and the Shield.

37 For a detailed discussion of these passages and their similarities, see Guerrini, "Cernere vultus".

Three of them stand out. First, the phrase 'singula lustra' recalls a passage in *Aeneid* 1 (453–458), in which Aeneas reviews the painted walls of the temple of Juno, depicting scenes from the Trojan war. Second, still in *Aeneid* 1, with reference to Aeneas' visit to the palace of Dido where he views the 'fortia facta patrum' (1.637–641) pictured on the silverware, we can draw a parallel with the images in the Sala degli Imperatori depicting the 'priscorum [...] tantorum gesta virorum'. Thirdly, in *Aeneid* 7, Aeneas visits the palace of Pico Laurente (7.177–182) and reviews the images of Pico's forefathers, introduced as the 'veterum effigies ex ordine avorum'.

These passages do not resonate with the Sala degli Imperatori on the same ideological level as Virgil's Parade of Heroes. There is no direct overlap between the heroes selected by Da Fiano and the 'pasts' or the 'forefathers' represented in these scenes. At the same time, they represent types of spaces that have much more in common with the Sala degli Imperatori than Virgil's Underworld, spaces (two of them also palaces) in which a specific past of ideological importance (the forefathers in two cases) is visually represented (painted or otherwise), to be reviewed and interpreted by visitors.

Moreover, these Virgilian passages have in common that they present the spaces and the visual imagery in them ekphrastically: Virgil's poetry not only describes the process of visiting and reviewing but also the images themselves. Da Fiano's project for the Sala degli Imperatori can be seen as an attempt to bring such literary spaces to life by means of more than just poetry: that is, through collaboration with the visual artists working in a real space. At the same time, the passages from the *Aeneid* also refer to the physical existence of such spaces in ancient Rome, and to their ideological significance and potential; the Sala degli Imperatori can also be considered an attempt to 'recreate' such a physical space from Antiquity.

A famous and, for our discussion, very relevant example of such a space is the Forum of Augustus where he put on display statues of his forefathers and other Roman 'summi viri', chief among whom were Aeneas and Romulus [Fig. 6.6]. Not only has this Forum already been recognised as an important model for Palazzo Trinci, its ideological connection with Virgil's Parade of Heroes is also widely acknowledged.³⁸ Even if opinions diverge on how this

38 The connection between the Sala degli Imperatori and the Forum of Augustus has been studied by Galassi, among others; see "Il palazzo Trinci" 81. For a discussion of the connection between the Forum and *Aeneid* 6, and further bibliography, see Pandey, N., *The Poetics of Power in Augustan Rome. Latin Poetic Responses to Early Imperial Iconography* (Cambridge: 2018), esp. ch. 4.

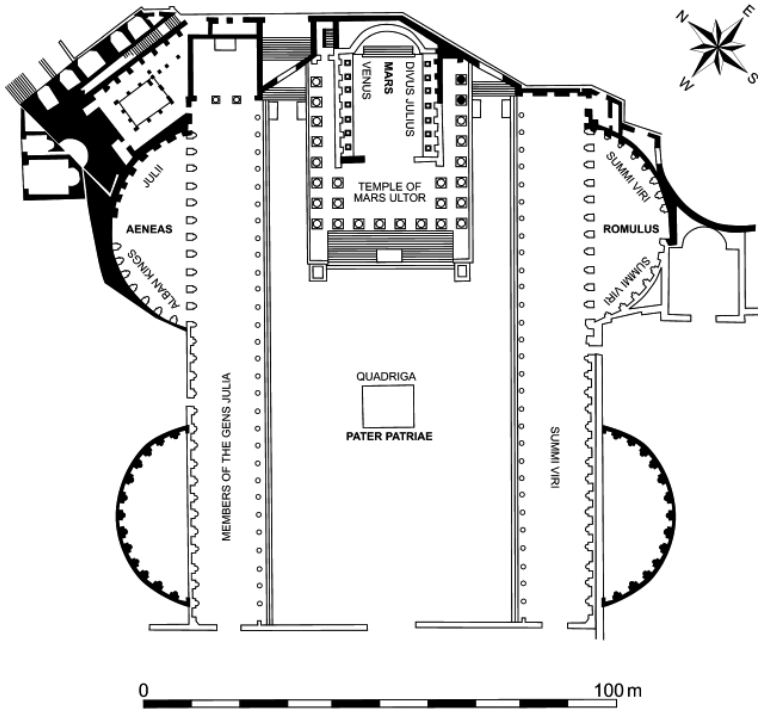


FIGURE 6.6 Plan of the Forum Augustum in light of recent excavations of the lower exedrae. Image reproduced from Pandey, *The Poetics of Power* 159
IMAGE © M.C. BISHOP

connection was concretely staged, the overlap between the two more or less contemporary 'ensembles' of Augustus' ancestors is obvious.

In terms of space and visual representation of the heroes, the Sala degli Imperatori is even closer to what we know of the Forum of Augustus than to Virgil's Underworld. Of course, the heroes, instead of passing before a stationary audience, have a fixed place in the space of the room. Moreover, their living effigies are large and placed in niches that tower above the viewer, while the Latin *tituli* are attached below. This setting and layout is very similar to what we see in Foligno, with the significant difference that both elements are represented here in painting [Fig. 6.7]. Another interesting connection is offered by the presence of Mars, whose temple was central to Augustus' Forum, and who is not only omnipresent in the poems by Da Fiano but was also thought to have given Foligno her name. Finally, Suetonius describes how Augustus declared his Forum a space that would be exemplary for posterity and instructive for rulers

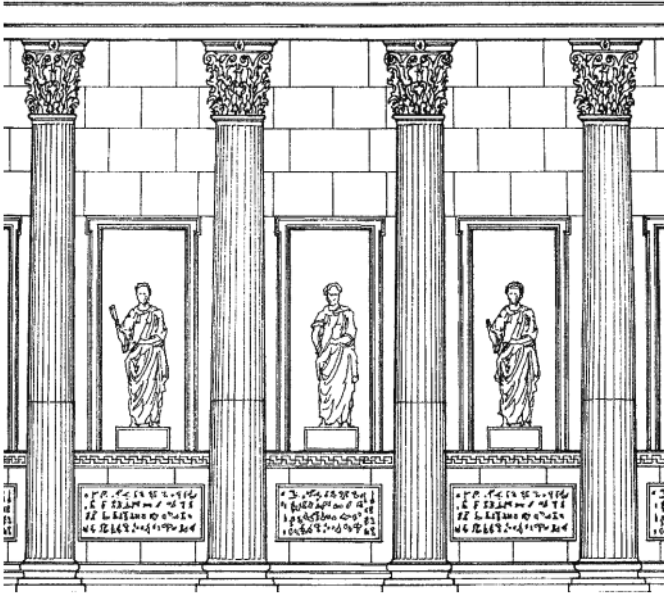


FIGURE 6.7 Reconstruction of the display of *summi viri* in the Forum of Augustus. Drawing by R.H. Abramson. Image reproduced from K. Galinsky, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, 2005, fig. 42

to come, which may have offered Da Fiano and others a further incentive to revive it.³⁹

When considering the similarities between the Sala degli Imperatori and the Forum of Augustus, it is worth noting that it had not yet been discovered at the beginning of the fifteenth century. However, contemporary humanist scholars were probably acquainted with it on the basis of ancient or contemporary antiquarian literature.⁴⁰ And we know that Da Fiano was part of this circle and actually visited the ruins of ancient Rome, as he is mentioned as a companion

39 Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.5.

40 Ancient sources on the Forum Augustus and the statues include Suetonius, *Augustus*; Ovid, *Fasti*; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*; Pliny, *Natural History*; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*; and the Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Alexander Severus*. See Pandey, *The Poetics of Power* 163. I have not been able to check later antiquarian sources that Da Fiano may have had at his disposal.

in the accounts of the antiquarian scholar and writer Bartolomeo Bayguera.⁴¹ We can easily imagine that Da Fiano recognised the Forum of Augustus as an ideologically relevant space for his own project, similar to Virgil's Parade of Heroes. It was the constant blurring between the literary and the physical that made such spaces so interesting, both in Antiquity and in the Renaissance.

Even if the Sala degli Imperatori, unlike Virgil's Underworld, is a real physical space, it still makes sense to consider it as a literary space. For one thing, it can be seen as a transformation of Virgil's literary Underworld, and alludes to other literary spaces created in the *Aeneid* as well. It is also a literary space, because it (re)creates a type of space that existed physically in Antiquity but was known primarily through literature. Finally, it uses literature to create narrative movement. For, when it comes to movement in space, there is, of course, an important difference between the Forum of Augustus and Virgil's Parade of Heroes: in the Forum visitors were free to circumambulate, and there was no strict order to the route they took, whereas in the *Aeneid* the order is a given by the narrative.⁴² It seems that Da Fiano was more like Virgil in this respect, guiding his visitor through the room in a specific or at least preferred order. How did he do that?

5 Moving around with Da Fiano as Literary Guide

Visitors to the room who read the opening poem upon entering were shown what they could expect, and what they were supposed to do. After seeing and admiring the faces (*vultus*) of the ancient heroes, they should feast their eyes on their deeds (*gesta*), reviewing them one by one. This presupposes a movement around the room: but where to start? The readers who recognised the connection to Virgil would have known to start with Romulus. It is therefore telling that our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visitors, Cesare Conti and Lodovico Iacobilli, who had no access to the poem or the image of Romulus, started with Marcus Cassius Scaeva, beginning their accounts with what was immediately visible from the side where they entered.

41 See Monti C.M., "Figure di umanisti nell'Itinerarium di Bartolomeo Bayguera: Coluccio Salutati e Francesco Da Fiano", *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 31 (2011) 87–106. The event recounted by Bayguera took place in 1421.

42 Pandey, "The Poetics of Power".

The poem also emphasises the use of the eyes: but how exactly? More specific indications are found in the first verse dedicated to Julius Caesar, the second hero represented on the southwest side of the room:

Riese, *Anth.* 855d, "Iulius Caesar"
 Volve tuos oculos, metuendum hunc aspice, lector,
 Armorum bellicue ducem. [...] ⁴³

Turn your eyes, and look at him here, reader, the fearsome leader of weapons and war.

This verse reflects the close interaction between reading and viewing that is crucial to Da Fiano's design, which explicitly mobilises the eyes. To (re)view the heroes' faces and outward appearance, looking at their painted images is crucial. However, to (re)view their deeds, reading the poems written on the wall is central. Text and image collaborate, but they do not overlap: the images give hardly any information about the heroes' lives and deeds; the poems give hardly any information about their appearance, and unlike Virgil's poetry they are not ekphrastic.⁴⁴

It is telling that the visitor is addressed as *lector* (reader): not because the poems could stand on their own, as has been suggested, but because reading these lines is crucial in initiating the experience of visiting the room.⁴⁵ Visitors can continue to repeat the same process from this point onwards: moving from one hero to the other while walking clockwise, reading the poems, looking up at the images, and so on, until they have made a full round. Along the way, the epigrams offer the visitor a diversified experience, enabling him to hear different 'voices'. Various heroes are addressed in the second person: besides Augustus also Tiberius, Marcus Marcellus, Scipio Africanus, Claudius Nero, and Caligula, betraying Da Fiano's continued presence in the room. Similarly, several epigrams stage the heroes speaking and addressing the visitor, as we

43 Anth. 855d. See Guerrini, "Uomini di Pace" 376 for the specific references to *Aeneid* 6.

44 In the *Sala virorum illustrium* in Padova, based on Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, apart from the heroes themselves, small images were added representing their most important deeds. In the frescoes in Foligno, only the image of Claudius Nero with the head of Hasdrubal offers some clue to his deeds.

45 Revest – Delzant, "L'artiste" 48 interprets the address to the reader as proof that the epigrams were conceived of separately.

see in the epigrams dedicated to Marcus Cassius Scaeva, Gaius Marius, and Pompey the Great.⁴⁶

All this leads to a lively experience, in which the Roman heroes are included in the conversation with Da Fiano and the visitors, not only addressed but also speaking for themselves. In addition, it seems that they are also conversing among each other, for they turn towards each other in pairs, with the exception of Augustus.⁴⁷ The resulting simultaneous presence of all the characters from different time periods in one room, in conversation with each other, is much more lively than any of the literary spaces created by Virgil.

On the other hand, in the *Aeneid* the images themselves are described in much more detail by means of ekphrasis. In Da Fiano's ensemble, since the images themselves are painted, the poems did not need to be ekphrastic. And indeed, they include hardly any information about how the images look, such as what the figures are wearing. A few descriptive details, however, hint at the character's faces: Cincinnatus can be recognised from his curly hair; Decius is identified by the white bands on his head; Fabius Maximus has a grim expression; and Caligula looks at himself in a mirror, to render his face even more terrifying.

In the Sala degli Imperatori, Da Fiano presents himself as the ultimate literary guide. In terms of Virgil's template, he takes the role of Anchises, who guides the visitors as if they were a second Aeneas. But the metapoetic potential of the literary guide goes further; just as in the *Aeneid* Anchises is a figure for the poet, so Da Fiano also clearly presents himself as 'the new Virgil'. This concerns not just his relationship with Ugolino, whom he praises as the new Augustus, but also with the visitors to the room, who in following his lead can be equated with the 'readers' of the *Aeneid*. And as such, he stands for the writer as the mastermind behind the literary space in which the narrative evolves, who made the selection and guides the movements and ultimately the interpretation of the reader/viewer. But the literary guide also stands for the writer as the mastermind of poetic memory, because, in offering guidance to the visitor, he selects and appropriates from the works of earlier writers, and steps in the footsteps of earlier literary guides.⁴⁸

46 A complete overview of the various communicative styles in Guerrini, "Cernere vultus".

47 The fact that the heroes seem to be conversing with each other, may reflect the idea of 'deliberation' and could be a reflection of the assemblies that were held in this room. Revest – Delzant, "L'artiste" 42 suggests that the number of 20 heroes reflects the number of influential people who would be united here to take important decisions.

48 Famous literary guides are Evander in *Aeneid* 8, the *monstrator* in Lucan 9, Virgil in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, or "Fortezza" in the contemporary *Quadriregio* by Federico Frezzi. For

6 Epilogue: The Writing on the Wall

In secondary literature on Virgil's Parade of Heroes, Anchises' role has been compared to that of an audioguide.⁴⁹ Could we then consider Da Fiano's poetry in the Sala degli Imperatori in a similar way? In fact, there is already an audio-tour available for visitors to the Palazzo Trinci nowadays, in which the painter Gentile da Fabriano plays the guide. Now, based on our analysis of Da Fiano's central role, seeing how he guides us through the room, encourages us to look at the paintings, and provides us with information about the heroes' deeds, we might propose that the museum let the role of guide be played by the poet instead of the painter, using his (translated) poems as the primary content.

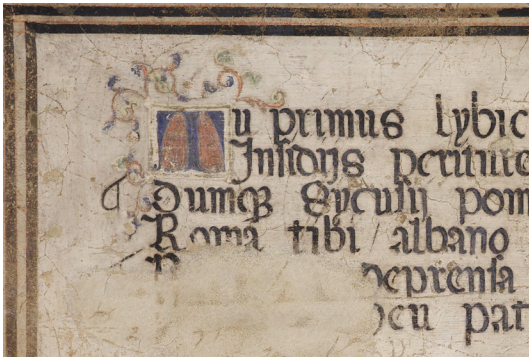
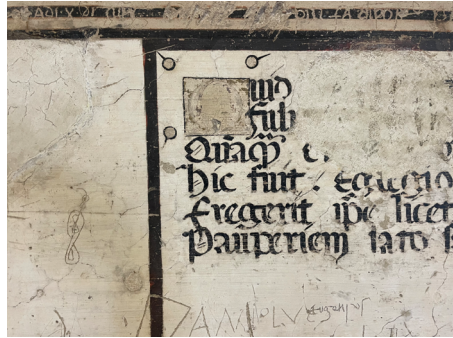
By way of concluding this article, let me consider the question to what extent such an audioguide with Da Fiano's poems would do justice to his objectives. It would clearly answer to several requirements, such as conveying the ideological message of the ensemble, and emphasizing the collaboration between poetry and painting in it. However, it seems that Da Fiano had an additional motive: he also wanted to thematise the act of reading. And here I refer not primarily to all the intertextual links to earlier texts, without which the room would be much less easy to 'read', but to the physical act of reading and the visual aspects of the written word, which would be lost if you would only *hear* the words.

We can gather the importance of reading from the explicit address to the visitor as a *lector* (reader), because anyone (literate) looking at the written words on the wall immediately becomes a reader.⁵⁰ But even more clearly, we can see this – also in a literal sense – in the way Da Fiano's epigrams are represented in painting. We have already noted that a significant difference between the Sala degli Imperatori and the Forum of Augustus is in the painting: both the sculpture and the marble *tituli* are represented here in fresco. However, whereas the painted niches may suggest a setting like the Forum, the representation of the heroes themselves and the texts underneath are different. The painted figures are not meant to look like sculpture, neither do the painted texts imitate inscriptions. In fact, their specific layout is very similar to

this Virgilian role in Renaissance epic, among others in Petrarca's *Africa*, see Beer S. de, "In the Footsteps of Aeneas. Humanist Appropriations of the Virgilian Walk through Rome in *Aeneid* 8", *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 66 (2017) 23–55.

49 Pandey, "The Poetics of Power".

50 A word that also recalls *legere* in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6.755 (translated in the Loeb edition with 'scan').



FIGURES 6.8A, B AND C
Gentile da Fabriano and
Francesco da Fiano, Decorated
initials of three of Da Fiano's
poems painted in the Sala degli
imperatori, the first dedicated to
Scipio Africanus, the second to
Marcus Curius Dentatus and the
third to Marcus Marcellus

IMAGE © SUSANNA DE BEER

contemporary manuscripts, both in the style of writing as well as in the illustrations surrounding the opening letters [Fig. 6.8a, b and c]. By this means the visitor is given the impression that he is reading a(n illustrated) *book*.

More specifically – but more research would be necessary to corroborate this – the layout of the words on the wall seems to point to the influence of manuscripts of Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, which Da Fiano almost certainly knew [Fig. 6.9].⁵¹ This link is interesting because it reveals a strong affinity between illustrated manuscripts and painted cycles of 'famous men'. On the one hand, there is a practical connection: in Petrarch's case, it was the same painter Altichiero who illustrated his manuscripts of *De viris illustribus*, and also painted the large frescoes in Padova that were based on this text. And it was probably also through reading these manuscripts, and through his acquaintance with the painted cycle in Padova, that Da Fiano was inspired

⁵¹ See Galassi, "Un signore", p. 273. Especially interesting in this respect are mss. Lat. 6069 F, G and I, from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

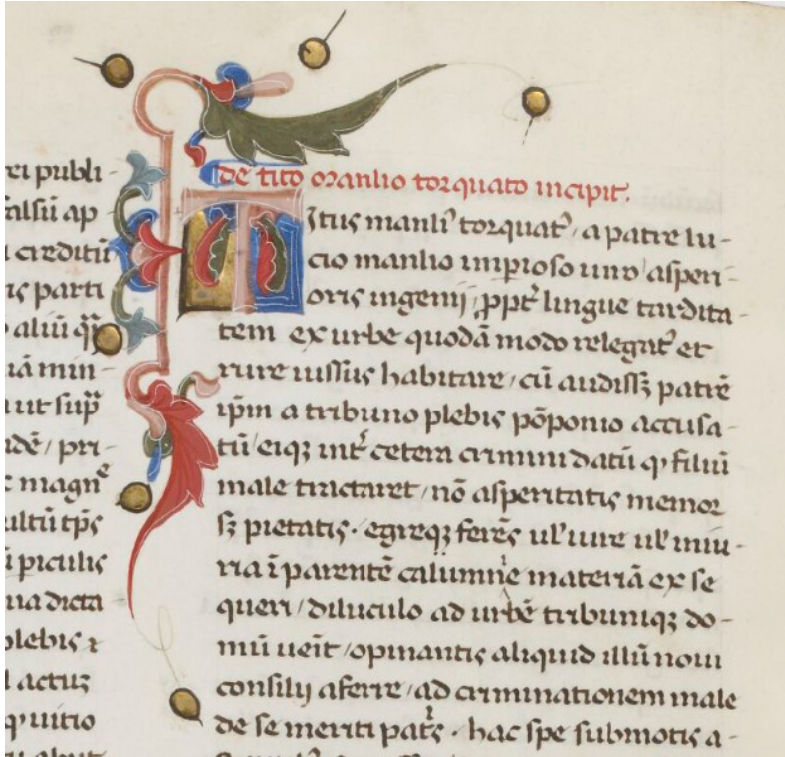


FIGURE 6.9 Decorated initial of the life of Titus Manlius Torquatus, in Petrarch, *De viris illustribus*, 1379. Codex Lat. 6069F, fol. 10v. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

IMAGE © GALlica.BNF.FR/BNF

to create such a gallery of his own. His imitation of these manuscripts' layout could thus be seen as a way to pay homage to his famous predecessor.

But on the other hand, there is also a conceptual connection that reveals how illustrated manuscripts and painted cycles of famous men were essentially seen as commensurate: ensembles that call for a similar combination of reading and viewing, though on a different scale. Da Fiano, by adopting such a layout for his painted poems, equated the experience of visiting the Sala degli Imperatori with the experience of reading an illuminated manuscript. And if we go one step further, we might think of the frescoes as representing the imagination of the person who reads the texts underneath. For what are these illustrations – also in manuscripts – other than an attempt to visualise the textual presence of the heroes? This brings us back to Da Fiano's appropriation

of Virgil. Because it is above all by interacting with the *Aeneid*'s various literary and ekphrastic spaces that Da Fiano turns the Sala degli Imperatori into a reflection on the relative merits of the arts, and into an example of their complex yet productive interaction; a sophisticated message available for those visitors who were able to read the writing on the wall.

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