

Averroes, Islam, and Heterodoxy in the Spanish Chapel *Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*

Abstract

This article examines Andrea di Bonaiuto's image of Averroes in the *Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas* (Spanish Chapel, Florence: 1365–69), explored alongside Bonaiuto's primary visual source, Lippo Memmi's panel painting, *Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas* (Pisa, c. 1323–30), and Dante's *Commedia*. I argue that Bonaiuto's iconography, developed within a Dominican context, is unique to the Spanish Chapel *Triumph* because it propagates Averroes as both a heterodox philosopher and a heretical Muslim precisely at a time when the Arab philosopher was acclaimed as the Great Commentator. Through comparative analysis, I demonstrate that Bonaiuto makes significant modifications to Memmi's *Triumph*, the panel painting which first establishes an Aquinas-Averroes iconographic formula created to uphold the orthodoxy of Thomistic Aristotelianism by casting Averroes into a contemptible position, a formula also utilised by Benozzo Gozzoli in a later *Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas* (Pisa, c. 1470–75). I argue that Memmi's image of Averroes can be read as a Dominican comment on the heterodoxy of Arabic Aristotelianism in spite of its widespread reception into Latin scholasticism. This feature is further developed by Bonaiuto who presents Averroes as an indolent philosopher and in a departure from Memmi's formula, as a heretical Muslim. Such a reading is further elucidated when Bonaiuto's *Triumph* is considered alongside Dante's literary treatment of Arabic philosophers, the Prophet Muhammad, and Christian heresy in the *Commedia*, ultimately revealing that the reception of Arabic philosophers is entangled with Islam in a far more complex and ambiguous manner than once considered.¹

1. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Anne Marie D'Arcy who introduced me to the Spanish Chapel and its fascinating fresco cycle. Heartfelt thanks also go to Dr Kristin Bourassa and Dr Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto for reading drafts of this paper and providing invaluable advice, support and encouragement, and to the editor and anonymous reviewers for their instrumental suggestions and comments.

2. Hereafter referred to as *Triumph of Thomas*. The chapter house was renamed the *Cappellone degli Spagnoli* (Great Spanish Chapel) in 1540 by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–1574) in honor of his wife, Eleanor of Toledo and the Spanish community in Florence for whom the space was designated, see Baldini 102–03.

A pensive Averroes sits at the centre of Andrea di Bonaiuto's large scale fresco, *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas* (c. 1365–1369) found in the chapter house and friary (Spanish Chapel) of Florence's principal Dominican basilica, Santa Maria Novella (cf. Brown; Meiss; Smart; Offner and Steinweig; Gardner; De Marchi and Sisi).² Visualised using the generic iconographic markers designating a Saracen in western medieval art – enrobed, turbaned and bearded – the



Figure 1. Averroes (detail) *Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*, Andrea di Bonaiuto (c. 1365–69). Florence, Spanish Chapel (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

Figure 2. *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*, Andrea di Bonaiuto (1365–69). Florence, Spanish Chapel (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

3. The iconography of a Saracen wearing a turban or a *tortil*, a knotted headband, became commonplace across all forms of visual expression in the Middle Ages. This headgear, whether in mural paintings or illuminated manuscripts, became an instantly recognizable symbol that enforced a stereotypical portrait of the oriental Other that required little or no textual explanation. For a comprehensive study of the iconography of the Saracen, Tartar and Jew in medieval art see Strickland, esp. 174 and 180–81.

4. A late fifteenth-century example also exists in Filipino Lippi's *Triumph of Thomas* (Carafa Chapel: Rome, c. 1492). However, a number of substantial changes are made to the iconographic formula that render it outside the scope of this study. For more on Lippi's *Triumph* see Geiger.

twelfth-century Arab philosopher leans against a closed book with his left hand resting dejectedly under his chin. He issues a morose stare in recognition of the ill-fated position meted out to him as he sits under the feet of Thomas Aquinas (Figure 1).³ This image draws on an iconographic formula that places Averroes in a hierarchical configuration with Aquinas, which was first established in a panel painting in the church of Santa Caterina, Pisa attributed to the circle of Lippo Memmi (c. 1323–30). Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas* set the stylistic and compositional tone for asserting Aquinas' authority over Averroes, a formula adopted by Bonaiuto and copied a century later by Benozzo Gozzoli in his *Triumph of Thomas*, a wall panel commissioned for Pisa Cathedral (c. 1470–75).⁴ This article argues that Bonaiuto's image of Averroes is distinct from its exemplars and far more complex than recognised thus far. It contends that Bonaiuto adapts a number of Memmi's key stylistic features in order to create an image of Averroes that functions as a narrative device to emphasize not only the heterodoxy of Arabic philosophy, as intended in Memmi's original formula, but to also enforce the heresy of Islam. This builds on the brief remarks on Averroes' 'Mohammadenism' first made by Joseph Polzer in his ground-breaking study on Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas*, which, despite the unfortunate use of orientalist language, continues to remain the most comprehensive examination of the wall painting and subsequent iterations of the iconographic formula (Polzer, "Triumph of Thomas" 48). However, while Polzer underscores the significance of the figure of Averroes, he provides little comment on how the image reflects Islam as a heresy. This article contends that such an examination is vital and crucial for understanding both Bonaiuto's distinct image of Averroes and its implications for the depiction of heresy in the Spanish Chapel fresco cycle.

This study begins with a brief examination of the Spanish Chapel's *Triumph of Thomas* in order to demonstrate its particular concern with heresy. It then moves to a comparison of Bonaiuto's fresco and Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas* with reference to Gozzoli's fifteenth-century adaptation, focusing on the stylistic features used to depict Averroes as a heterodox Arabic philosopher. In particular, it suggests that Bonaiuto's specific representation of a pensive Averroes positions his philosophical heterodoxy with the Christian sin of *acedia* that aligns his spiritual idleness with religious heresy. This is further enforced through an examination of the motif of open, closed and

5. The bibliography on this topic is extensive, here I offer a few, key works on Boccaccio, Dante and Trecento art see Gilbert, *Poets Seeing Artists' Work*; Gilbert, "Art Historical Period Terms" and Gilbert, "Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes". For more recent work see Dameron 2005.

overtaken books not only in the *Triumphs of Thomas*, but Bonaiuto's *Via Veritatis*, a large-scale fresco that stands on the east wall of the Spanish Chapel. However, in order to better understand the complexity of this image, the study also turns to Dante's *Commedia*. Trecento art and literature have long been read together with a particular focus on the interconnections between visual and textual narrative and imagery during a period that witnessed remarkable cultural production.⁵ Thus, a visual exposition that is concerned with faith, philosophy and Averroes in Florentine art must be read in conjunction with *Inferno* 4 where Dante deems Averroes the Great Commentator. By the 1360s, this epithet was recognized, affirmed and contended in the early commentaries of the *Commedia*, including Boccaccio's *Lecturae Dantis*. Moreover, the *Commedia* is essential for understanding one key alteration to the Aquinas-Averroes iconographic formula particular to the Spanish Chapel fresco. In Bonaiuto's *Triumph of Thomas*, Averroes is buttressed on either side by a Christian heretic; Arius on his left and Sabellius on his right. Thus far, critics have read this unique configuration as a simple exposition of heresy, where Averroes functions as the philosopher 'arch-heretic', a role accorded to him in Dominican propaganda, in spite of his prominence in Latin university curricula (Meiss 103–04). I contend that Bonaiuto's depiction of a visible Muslim in the company of two Christian arch-heretics is much more precise and targets Averroes' greater heresy – his adherence to Islam. Such a reading is made apparent when the image is examined alongside Dante's treatment of Christian heresy in *Paradiso* 13 and Islam in *Inferno* 28 that draws on recent studies that align Arius with Muhammad in the *Commedia*.

The Spanish Chapel *Triumph of Thomas* sits within a meticulously composed visual narrative considered "among the most impressive records of Dominican art and thought in late medieval Italy" (Polzer 262). A large scale fresco decorates each wall of the chapter house, the *Life of St Peter Martyr* (south wall), the *Via Veritatis* (east wall) and the *Triumph of Thomas* (west wall). These frescoes are supported by a depiction of the Christological cycle which runs across the four vaults; the *Crucifixion* (north vault) the *Navicella* (west vault) the *Ascension* (south vault) and the *Pentecost* (east vault).⁶ The fresco cycle was once considered to have been inspired by the sermons of the prior of Santa Maria Novella, Jacopo Passavanti, whose image can be located in the *Via veritatis*, standing in front of a figural depic-

6. See Baldini 189–221 for high resolution printed images of each mural.

7. Adolfo Venturi first suggested that the fresco-cycle is based on the prior of Santa Maria Novella, Jacopo di Passavanti's *Specchio de vera penitenza*, cf. Meiss 101–02; Norman 233–34 and Polzer 275. Buonamico Lapo Guidalotti commissioned and funded the construction of the chapter house and friary in 1348, after the death of his wife from the Black Death. Buonamico died seven years later, but left an additional four hundred florins in his will to fund the fresco-cycle and requested for both him and his wife to be laid to rest in the chapel. The Florentine merchant is also buried in the chapter house in Dominican habit with an epitaph memorialising his mercantile activity.

8. Housley's work continues to remain the fullest exploration of the later Crusades in Europe, see *The Italian Crusades* and *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades*.

9. The chapter house also functioned as an inquisition space for interrogating suspected heretics, including the mystic, Catherine of Siena, who was brought to the chapter house while Bonaiuto was completing the frescoes, see Borsook 141.

10. "Optavi et datus est mihi sensus; et invocavi et venit in me spiritus sapientiae", identified by Polzer 49.

tion of Buonamico Lapo Guidalotti – the Florentine merchant who commissioned and funded the construction and decoration of the chapter house.⁷ However, Millard Meiss has suggested that Bonaiuto himself designed the exceptional iconographic programme in consultation with Dominican friars in the *stadium generale* (cf. Meiss 101–02). In following Meiss, it becomes clear that the frescoes assert a potent form of mendicant propaganda designed to enforce the chief purpose of the Dominican Order: the salvation of pagans, heretics and schismatics through the power of preaching and intellectual debate. Since the foundation of the Dominican Order under the Papal bull, *Religiosam vitam* (22 December 1216), its principal concern was the eradication of heresy, but the frescoes also depict specific concerns about heresy in Florence during the 1360s. As Meiss points out, just when Bonaiuto began painting the fresco cycle, "Urban V issued a bull urging inquisitors to be more active against heresy" (Meiss 103). This recurrent bull, *In Coena Domini* (12 October 1363), adopted a stringent stance against heretics and schismatics in particular. This included such lay rulers as the Visconti family, who had been the subject of a papal crusade in 1324 following John XXII's condemnation of Matthew Visconti as a heretic, as well as contemporary concerns regarding the *routiers* or mercenaries then wreaking havoc across Italy and France.⁸ During the 1360s, therefore heresy came in many different forms, but what was consistently reiterated was the dogma that no salvation is possible outside of the Church, as in the memorable words of the papal bull promulgated by Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam* (18 November 1302): "extra ecclesiam nulla salus". This doctrine is reinforced across the fresco cycle and in the very fabric of the chapter house; as Julian Gardner notes, the thematic concern with eradicating heresy would have been 'eminently appropriate' for the liturgical and ceremonial functions that took place there, including examining and admitting members to the Order (Gardner 120).⁹

At immediate sight, it may not appear that the *Triumph of Thomas* is explicitly concerned with the theme of extirpating heresy (figure 2). An enthroned Aquinas occupies the centre of the composition, holding the *Book of Wisdom* at a page that aptly reads, "I prayed and understanding was given me; I called and spirit of wisdom came to me" (7.7).¹⁰ This call is heeded by those who surround his figure: he is flanked by Job, David, Paul, Mark and John the Evangelist to his left, while on his right sit Matthew, Luke, Moses, Isaiah and Solomon, all of whom carry scripture. Flying above Aquinas' throne are three

11. According to Polzer, Vasari was the first to identify the figures as representative of Arius, Averroes and Sabellius. For a discussion on Vasari's *Life of Artists* and the *Triumphs*, see Polzer, "Triumph of Thomas", 49.

12. For a full exposition of the scheme see Norman 226 and Baldini 102–03.

theological and four cardinal virtues: Faith, Charity, Hope, Temperance, Prudence, Justice and Fortitude (cf. Offner and Steinweg 21). Directly under Aquinas' feet, in a rounded balcony, sit Arius, Averroes and Sabellius; the two Christian heretics are turned to their side, while Averroes is depicted in a frontal image facing the audience.¹¹ These figures give way to the depiction of the Trivium and Quadrivium in the lower register of the composition. Here, we find the seven sacred and secular sciences depicted as feminine, abstract personifications, and embodied by male historical authorities, as is typically found in late medieval representations of the liberal arts. In terms of the secular sciences of the Quadrivium we find Arithmetic embodied by Pythagoras, Geometry by Euclid, Astronomy by Ptolemy and Music by Tubal Cain. In the Trivium, Dialectic is embodied by Aristotle, Rhetoric by Cicero and Grammar by Donatus. In terms of the sacred sciences, Civil Law is embodied by Justinian, Canon Law by either Clement V or Innocent IV, Holy Scripture by Jerome, and Theology by Plato, Dionysius the Aeropagite, John of Damascus and Augustine.¹²

The division of the fresco into two registers asserts Aquinas' dual role as both the divinely sanctioned master of scholasticism and its classical foundation and the Dominican extirpator of heresy. His stance over Arius, Averroes and Sabellius is an overt expression of the latter, demonstrated in the resemblance between his figure and the iconography of emperors in early Christian art who stand in victory above church councils showing their dedication to the condemnation of heresy (cf. Norman 232). However, while critics have largely focused on the image of Aquinas, they have failed to notice that it is a Muslim philosopher and not a Christian heretic who is placed at the very heart of the fresco's composition. If we consider the fresco in this light, focusing on the image of Averroes at the core of the composition's denunciation of heresy and the narrative that celebrates orthodox scholasticism, we can begin to unravel the implications of Bonaiuto's modifications to his primary visual source, Lippo Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas* (c. 1323–30). In order to do this, we must first turn to Memmi's wall-painting and consider the position, scale and stylistic features of both Aquinas and Averroes.

Unlike Bonaiuto's *Triumph of Thomas*, Memmi's wall painting is dominated by a large-scale image of an enthroned Aquinas who governs the centre of the composition (figure 3). As the first visual codification of Aquinas' authorial stance *contra Averroistas*, commis-

13. The date has been established by Polzer, “Triumph of Thomas,” 29. In c. 1270, just on the cusp of Etienne Tempier’s official censures issued towards the teaching of Aristotle at the arts faculty of the University of Paris, Aquinas issued *De unitate intellectus*, a treatise that refuted the notion of the unicity of the material intellect, advocated by Averroes in his Long Commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima*. Later manuscripts of the treatise appended *contra Averroistas* to the title which explicitly directed Aquinas’ refutation toward a group of unnamed thinkers referred to as *Averroistas*, cf. Bianchi 75–76 and Hasse.

14. Cf. in particular, Proposition 40 ‘that there is no more excellent way of life than the philosophical way’ and Proposition 154, which condemned the idea “that the philosophers are the wisest men of this world”, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisensis*, I, 545; 552, cf. Flotin and O’Neill 1967 and Grant 1982.

sioned on the occasion of Aquinas’ canonization in 1323, the sheer scale of Aquinas reflects the Dominican propaganda effort to promulgate the nascent saint as the *Doctor angelicus*.¹³ This was pertinent at a time when a number of his theses on natural philosophy and theology were embroiled in the consequences of Etienne Tempier’s Condemnations issued at the University of Paris in 1270 and 1277.¹⁴ Indeed, the pointed choice of Averroes allowed Memmi to distance Aquinas from the heterodox movement that came to be associated, albeit tangentially, with the Arabic philosopher borne out of the Parisian controversies and instead, to propagate Aquinas’s authorial role in reconciling Aristotelianism with Christian orthodoxy. It is important to note that it also reflects the status of Averroes as an Aristotelian philosopher of significance, one whom even Aquinas held in high regard. This is visually asserted with an image of the Bible, which Aquinas holds open at *Proverbs* 8.7 supported on his lap by a number of manuscript folios representing his *Summa Theologiae*, a motif copied by both Bonaiuto and Gozzoli (Polzer, “Via Veritatis” 37). In Memmi’s *Triumph of Thomas* however, the Bible emits a series of golden rays representing divine wisdom which are conferred to figures who encircle Aquinas across three registers of the composition. Above Aquinas, we find the four Evangelists and Saint Paul and Moses, all of whom hold out opened pages of scripture. In the middle, divine rays are directed toward the figures of Aristotle and Plato who flank the domineering image of the saint; the twin pillars of classical authority stand with opened books, receiving and transmitting the sanctioned knowledge. Directly beneath them stand two congregations, identified by Polzer as clerics of all orders, some of whom look reverently towards Aquinas, others who are engaged in internal discussions (Polzer, “Triumph of Thomas” 39). One cleric looks disparagingly at the only horizontal figure in the painting, who is turbaned and bearded and occupies the lowest space between the mendicant figures and directly beneath the feet of Aquinas. The oriental figure who reclines desolately is Averroes. In contrast to Bonaiuto’s frontal, seated image of Averroes, here, the Arabic philosopher tilts to the left of the composition with his left arm hanging languidly over a pillow. His upturned hand rests on a raised level that bears his name while an overturned book is laid to his right. His head hangs low, and he issues a desolate stare slanted toward the bottom of the fresco (figure 4).

The horizontal, lapsed figure of Averroes and the rays of light which emanate from the Bible are two key features of Memmi’s fres-



Figure 3. *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*, Lippo Memmi (1323–30). Pisa, Santa Caterina (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

Figure 4. Averroes (detail) in *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*, Lippo Memmi (1323–30). Pisa, Santa Caterina (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).



co that assert his philosophical heterodoxy which Bonaiuto radically alters. That these are crucial amendments is clear when we understand the implications of them from the perspective of the image of Averroes and the theme of Arabic philosophical heterodoxy. In Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas*, the rays of light that extend out towards Aristotle and Plato are re-emanated back to Aquinas, demonstrating a diachronic relationship between classical learning, orthodox theology, and its reception into Latin Christian scholasticism. A single ray of light also extends from Aquinas to the overturned book laid at Averroes' feet, but, significantly, not to the image of the philosopher himself. This has been read as a reference to Aquinas' engagement with and correction of Averroes' thesis of the unicity of the intellect, which also acknowledges a line of intellectual transmission from Arabic into Latin (Polzer, "Triumph of Thomas" 47). The nuanced, dialectical relationship between Aquinas and Averroes' Aristotelianism and Arabic to Latin translation process is distilled in Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas* in order to uphold Thomistic Aristotelianism as the orthodox divine wisdom that is master of, and even divorced from, the heterodoxy ascribed to an Arab philosopher. However, it is also suggestive of a wider Dominican comment on the place of Arabic philosophy in orthodox Latin scholasticism, which is not necessarily reflective of the reception of Arabic Aristotelian commentaries in Latin learning. The composition explicitly enforces a sharp divide between Averroes and Aristotle: they do not inhabit the same register nor is there any indication of the deep intellectual relationship between Aristotelianism and Arabic philosophy. The sole ray from Aquinas to Averroes contrasts sharply with the multiple rays emanating back and forth from Aristotle, Plato and Aquinas. The movement of rays suggests sanctioned classical learning is in an exclusive dialectical relationship with orthodox Latin scholasticism, a relationship which is predicated on the exclusion and expulsion of authorized knowledge from Aristotle to an Arab, Muslim philosopher.

This is emphasized a century later in Benozzo Gozzoli's *Triumph of Thomas* (c. 1470–75). Even though the wall panel succeeds Bonaiuto's fresco, it is worth considering because it follows the essential architecture of Memmi's composition. Gozzoli's wall panel is divided into three explicit spheres where an enthroned Aquinas dominates the central zone. His opened Bible issues rays to Aristotle and Plato, who likewise, flank the Dominican saint. Unlike in Memmi's painting, the rays fall short of reaching Averroes, who, again is in a

15. The words on the page read “Et faciens causas infinitas in primum librum Aristotelis physicorum” cf. Polzer, “Triumph of Thomas” 49.

horizontal position under Aquinas’ feet. Instead, a single ray extends over Averroes to reach the congregation who occupy the lowest sphere. Explicitly evading Averroes in this manner suggests that by the fifteenth century, his philosophical heterodoxy is viewed with increased severity, specifically targeted towards Aquinas’ refutation of Averroes’ doctrine of the eternity of the world, as seen by the words printed on the semi-opened book held by Averroes (figure 5).¹⁵ Both Memmi and Gozzoli enforce Averroes’ philosophical heterodoxy in schemes that also assert a sharp divide between his oriental figure and the Classical and Christian spheres governed by Aquinas and Christ. However, Memmi in particular demonstrates that this heterodoxy is a result of misguided Christian knowledge. In Memmi’s *Triumph of Thomas*, Aquinas and Averroes are positioned in vertical alignment, in a *syzygy* similar to Bonaiuto’s *Triumph of Thomas*, but in Memmi’s wall painting this is bolstered by the addition of the image of Christ who stands at the apex of the fresco. The sharp vertical alignment that places Averroes in line with Christ emphasizes that all knowledge is issued from God (cf. Polzer, “Triumph of Thomas” 35). From the perspective of Averroes, however, it issues a stark, blunt warning against falling prey to misguided knowledge. Not heeding to orthodoxy results in exclusion and punishment that manifests in the horizontal, lapsed position meted out to the Arabic philosopher.

In Bonaiuto’s *Triumph of Thomas*, Averroes’ philosophical heterodoxy is not indicated by the use of rays or a lapsed, horizontal figure. Instead, in a stark departure from his primary visual source, Bonaiuto alters Memmi’s outstretched Averroes to a seated, frontal image (figure 1). This change is better understood if we consider that the image of a languid, despondent Averroes established by Memmi and copied by Gozzoli with particular vehemence as Averroes is laid out with his face on the ground and trampled under Aquinas’ feet, is a manifestation of the sin of *acedia* which causes his indolent philosophy. According to the theological classifications of sin, *acedia* was affiliated with spiritual inactivity which manifested itself in physical changes to the body, defined by Aquinas as “sadness over a spiritual value that troubles the body’s ease” (*Summa Theologiae* 84.4).¹⁶ In the Spanish Chapel *Triumph of Thomas*, this is transformed into Averroes’ hand resting upon his chin, supporting his head. This distinct gesture draws further on allegorical depictions of *acedia*. The clenched fist supporting the head depicts the physical symptom of Saturnine melancholia, witnessed in thirteenth-century gothic sculp-

16. “[...] et sic est acedia, quae tristatur de bono spirituali propter laborem corporalem adjunctum.” ed. and trans. Gilby *et al.* 74–75.



Figure 5. *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*, Benozzo Gozzoli (1470–75). Pisa, Duomo di Santa Maria Assunta. (Copyright: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Grand Palais).

17. Here, we find a winged female figure in the foreground of the composition, her blackened head slumped with her fist clenched holding up her head with a range of mathematical instruments laid around her figure. In their pivotal study, Klibansky and Saxl demonstrate that Dürer draws on the medieval ‘*typus Acediae*’ with the female personification of the liberal art, geometry, ‘*typus Geometriae*’ in order to create one of the most visually potent depictions of melancholy, or one born under Saturn. Here, *acedia* is the manifestation of the abstract notion of melancholy as madness bestowed to those born under Saturn who are predisposed to creative genius. See Klibansky, Saxl *et al.*, 306–17.

18. The full line reads “Potest tamen dici quod omnia peccata quae ex ignorantia proveniunt possunt reduci ad acediam, ad quam pertinet negligentia, qua aliquis recusat bona spiritualia acquirere propter laborem” (“nevertheless there is some reason to state that all sins resulting from ignorance are reducible to *acedia*; this implies neglect in seeking out spiritual good because of the labour involved”. Ed. and trans. Gilby *et al.* 76–77).

19. Prior to the Arabic commentaries, the Latin West was familiar with Aristotelian natural philosophy through the translations of Boethius (c. 480–524/5) and the twelfth-century scholars, James of Venice, Henricus Aristippus and Burgundio of Pisa (c. 1110–1193). During the latter half of the thirteenth century, William of Moerbeke (c. 1215–1286) was responsible for a number of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic translations, directly from the Greek, made at the request of his fellow Dominican, Thomas Aquinas. The earlier translations from Greek into Latin, particularly those undertaken by James of Venice and Burgundio of Pisa, were “rather haphazard” (Burnett “Arabic into Latin” 373) especially in contrast to the systematic and reliable translations of Arabic commentaries undertaken in twelfth-century Toledo in particular (see Burnett, “Coherence” 2001). William of Moerbeke’s fuller translations “quickly established themselves as the most popular, except in the case of the logical works” (Dod 49). The extent to which the

figures, and which comes to fruition in Albrecht Dürer’s sixteenth-century engraving, *Melencolia I*.¹⁷ Moreover, the hand that supports Averroes’ head brings attention to the pensive gaze that he issues, which is not as severely downcast as the image of Averroes depicted in either Memmi or Gozzoli’s later fifteenth-century painting, but is another indicator of his melancholia borne from his overexerted mental state – a result of his philosophical learning. There is a certain irony to this, considering Averroes himself provides a definition of melancholy in the *Colliget*, where he considers it to be a result of damage to the three faculties of the brain, causing a mental paralysis (cf. Klibansky and Saxl 91). From an orthodox Christian perspective, however, this form of melancholia is also a result of a neglected soul. According to Aquinas, *acedia* is also caused by “neglect in seeking out spiritual good because of the labour involved, and the ignorance capable of causing sin springs from wilful negligence” (*Summa Theologiae* 84.4).¹⁸ Overexertion in philosophical learning has led to Averroes’ greater sin – a neglect of his soul. His indolent philosophy is a result of his spiritual idleness. Thus, in transforming the languid Averroes to a pensive image, Bonaiuto is able to allude to the specific state of sin that afflicts Averroes, aligning the Muslim figure with Christian sin in a manner not seen in Memmi or taken up later in Gozzoli.

This comment on Averroes’ spiritual deficiency is further emphasized through Bonaiuto’s alteration of the symbolic book. It is no longer overturned, but closed shut and situated under Averroes’ arm, acting as the scaffold in his *acedia* that holds up the hand resting upon his chin. Averroes’ closed book is no longer a recipient of wisdom with scope to be corrected nor does it point to a particular philosophical doctrine. Instead, it underscores his position as both a heterodox and indolent philosopher and is the very cause of his exclusion among the celebrated figures in the lower register of the fresco. This is even more striking considering the images of the sacred and secular arts, which stand in the lower half of the fresco, including the three classical authorities whose writings were known in the Latin West via both Greek translations and Arabic commentaries, Aristotle, the embodiment of Dialectic; Ptolemy, the embodiment of Astronomy; and Euclid, the embodiment of Geometry, are all animated and hold opened books.¹⁹

Furthermore, the motif of the closed book is also set in dialogue with two scenes in the lower zone of the *Via Veritatis* the fresco that stands opposite the *Triumph of Thomas* in the Spanish Chapel. *The*

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Arabic translations contributed to the so-called rediscovery of Aristotle in the Latin West continues to be debated; while translations direct from the Greek were available and widely-used, the Arabic translations

continued to influence Latin scholasticism because of the variety of works translated that cut across a range of different genres of Arabic philosophical commentary (see Burnett, “Arabic into Latin” 2004).



Figure 6. Spanish Chapel, *Via Veritatis*, Andrea di Bonaiuto (c. 1365–69). Florence, Spanish Chapel (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

Figure 7. Peter Martyr preaching (detail) in *Via Veritatis*, Andrea di Bonaiuto (c. 1365–69). Florence, Spanish Chapel (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

Via Veritatis is divided into three compositional zones (figure 6). At the apex stands the figure of Christ depicted with a book in his right hand and a key in his left, emphasizing the importance of the divine word facilitated through Dominican doctrine which holds the key to true salvation. He is attended by the four evangelists in symbolic form and flanked on either side by choirs of the angelic host with Mary to the right of the composition and commands the dynamic and vivid temporal schemes in the two lower zones. The middle zone depicts an earthly paradise reminiscent of the verdant hills of Tuscany, the foreground to a range of lively figures plucking fruit from trees, playing, listening and dancing to music, all of whom are decorated in light hues of maroon, indigo and mustard. The lower zone is dominated by the image of the exterior elevation of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore under which stand a range of figures considered to represent a cross-section of Florentine society. Among the portraits are a number of recognizable figures who embody the Church Militant and Triumphant, identified as Pope Urban V (1310–1370), flanked by the Emperor Charles IV (1316–1378), and range of papal crusaders, including Amadeus of Savoy (1334–1383) and Peter I of Cyprus (1328–1369).²⁰

20. On the identification of these figures see Polzer “Via Veritatis”, Meiss, and Devlin.

Of note are the two scenes to the left of Santa Maria del Fiore that depict anti-heretical preaching led by Peter Martyr, and Thomas Aquinas. Here, both Dominican saints address a group of oriental figures in scenes that assert the dichotomy between rational faith and irrational philosophy directed toward Islam specifically. Peter Martyr preaches to an animated crowd, few of whom are listening attentively while several seem to be actively objecting (figure 7). Next to him, Aquinas argues the case of Christianity through the written word to a group of oriental figures, identified through their headgear as Muslims and Jews (figure 8).²¹ In this particular iconographic scene, Aquinas, cast upright and exalted, stands with an open book directing the group to the written word on the page, identified by Polzer as the *Summa contra gentiles*: “Veritatem meditabitur guttur meum et labia mea detestabuntur impium” (“My mouth shall meditate truth and my lips shall hate wickedness;” cf. “Triumph of Thomas” 269). As Polzer asserts, this Christian truth seems to make this group more susceptible to Aquinas’ means of conversion, in particular a figure who rips “the heretical book to shreds” (Polzer, “Triumph of Thomas” 269). The prominent figure who stands hunched over in the act of destroying his book wears a turban that identifies him as a converted Muslim, which has implications for the damaged book in

21. One of the kneeling figures has been identified by Meiss to be representative of a converted Jew made visible through his kippah, which is thought to be a direct allusion to Aquinas’ conversion of two Jews at Molaria; cf. Meiss 98.



Figure 8. Thomas Aquinas preaching (detail) in *Via Veritatis*, Andrea di Bonaiuto (c. 1365–69). Florence, Spanish Chapel (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

Figure 9. Heretic ripping book (detail) in *Via Veritatis*, Andrea di Bonaiuto (c. 1365–69). Florence, Spanish Chapel (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).



hand, possibly representing a Qur'an (figure 9). Having received Aquinas' sanctioned orthodox theology, he can only enter heaven's gate, as depicted in the middle zone of the *Via Veritatis*, if he denounces anti-scripture. The potential representation of a torn-up Qur'an would resonate deeply in the context of a Dominican chapter house considering the particular mendicant pursuit of Arabic in order to refute Islam's holy book. Indeed, one of the most prominent Dominican friars to read the Qur'an in Arabic and Latin, Riccoldo da Monte Croce, once prior of Santa Maria Novella, propagated the notion of Islam as an inherently irrational religion.²² The irrationalism accorded to Islam and its followers is evinced with force in the body language of the Saracen figure whose hunched stance is indicative of his position as a heretic. Moreover, alongside Averroes, this is the only other prominent depiction of an oriental figure depicted with a book. While the figures stand in two vastly different compositional schemes they both reflect and enforce different means of silencing heretical literature. The oriental figure who rips up his holy book demonstrates he is on the road to a Christian salvation, while Averroes' remains closed with no hope for redemption.

From these two scenes it is unclear whether Islam is represented as a heresy, a schism or as paganism but this ambivalence is reflective of the multivalent classification accorded to Islam and Muslims in Latin Christendom witnessed in Peter of Cluny's famous testimony, "I cannot cogently decide [...] whether the Mohammadan error must be called a heresy, and its followers heretics, or whether they are to be called pagans" (Kritzeck 143–44). From at least the time of John of Damascus who categorized Islam as the last of 101 heresies, Islam was characterized as a form of heterodox Christianity or schism because of its monotheism, its theological claim to Christ and Mary, and its denial of the Trinity.²³ Islam's denial of the divinity of the Logos made it Arian; its denial of Christ's divine nature made it Nestorian, while its attitude toward demons laid it open to charges of Manichaeism as defined as a Christian heresy (cf. Pelikan 2.229). However, by the time Bonaiuto was painting the chapter house frescoes, heresy was used "as a common noun in referring to Islam" encouraged by the Latin translations of the Qur'an, first commissioned by Peter of Cluny in 1144.²⁴ It was also considered to be a Christian schism, best exemplified by Dante who positions the Prophet of Islam and his nephew, 'Ali in the ninth *bolgia* of *Malebolge* (*Inferno* 28), the circle of schismatics. In *Inferno*, Dante distinguishes between heretics, who obstinately question or deny the truths of the Church, which

22. Following Latin polemic on Islam, Riccoldo da Monte Croce focused on the laws of polygamy and Qur'anic descriptions of paradise as indicators of Islam's inherent irrationality cf. Tolan 252 and George-Trvtkovic.

23. Cf. Sahas, which continues to remain a good introduction to the Eastern Christian monk.

24. On the earlier scholarly division between a popular and learned view of Islam see Daniel *Heroes and Saracens* and Daniel *Islam and the West*, which still stand as good introductions to medieval western views on Islam. More recently, the superfluity of this divide has been demonstrated by Tolan, *Saracens* cf. 10–11.

25. “See how Mahomet is mangled! / Before me goes Ali in tears, / his face cleft from chin to forelock” trans. Sinclair, 349. Cf. Resconi, 246 whose focus on the prosodic features of the lines demonstrates that Dante is urging the reader to look, ‘vedi’.

26. Gautier, Guibert and Embrico all include the idea that Muhammad was an epileptic, see Tolan *Saracens* 140. Eastern Christian writers distorted the account told in the Islamic hadith that the Prophet Muhammad met a Christian monk, Bahira, who recognised his mark of Prophethood. Bahira is transformed into a Christian heretic, at times a Nestorian or an Arian, who influences Muhammad. Cf. Tolan *Saracens* 52–53; 141 and Wolf, 13–26.

27. See also Inglese’s note to the text, “L’onore reso allo Stagirità, attraverso colui che ne redasse il *Commentarium magnum*, chiude circolarmente il catalogo degli spiriti grandi nella virtù intellettuale”, (Inglese, 81).

28. Averroes and Avicenna are not the only Muslims to appear in Dante’s cosmology. The Ayyubid sultan, Saladin is also included in *Inferno* IV, commended for his chivalric skill. We also find a Muslim Sultan in *Paradise* XI, thought to represent Sultan of Egypt, al-Kamil al-Malik (1180–1238), who appears in Thomas Aquinas’ recount of Francis of Assisi’s meeting with the sultan in 1219 in order to convert him amidst the Fifth Crusade. For more on the meeting between the sultan and saint, cf. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan* and “Mendicants and Muslims”. We also find a number of “Islamophiles” scattered across the *Divine Comedy*, including Manfred, king of Sicily, son of Frederick II who is found in Purgatory, and Pier della Vigne who is condemned in *Inferno* VIII, cf. Toorawa. For an excellent overview of Muslim and Jewish figures in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* see Negròn.

are to be believed by divine faith, and schismatics, who refuse to submit to papal authority, in communion with the Church. It is worth turning to this scene because Dante consolidates the notion of Islam as a schism through the torturous *contrapasso* that Muhammad and ‘Ali are forced to undergo:

Vedi come storpiato è Maometto!
Dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Ali,
Fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto (*Inferno* 28.31–33)²⁵

The cloven face of ‘Ali symbolizes the effects of schism, while the depiction of Muhammad’s mangled, suspended body accords with the type of punishment accorded to a heretical, *pseudopropheta*. The notion of the imposter prophet developed in the twelfth century through a number of Latin *Vitae* of Muhammad which perpetuated the idea of a mutable *pseudopropheta* who encompassed everything from a bellicose, licentious charlatan to a heretical magician and a Christian antipope (cf. Tolan; Yolles and Weiss). Of particular importance was the notion that Muhammad’s theological beliefs were a product of his epileptic seizures, a clear sign of his irrational mind, in addition to the distorted idea that the young Muhammad was influenced by a Nestorian or Arian monk rendering him a Christian heretic (Cf. Embrico of Mainz *Vita Mahumeti*; Walter of Compiegne *Otia de Machomete*; Adelphus *Vita Machometi* and Guibert of Nogent *The Deeds of God through the Franks*).²⁶

As critics have long noted, Dante’s treatment of Islam stands in sharp contrast to his treatment of Averroes who is enshrined as the Great Commentator in *Inferno* 4, “che ’l gran comento féo” (“he who made the Great Commentary” 144).²⁷ Dante grants the Arab philosopher a place in Limbo to spend eternity as a virtuous pagan, as part Aristotle’s philosophic family (4.132). In a reversal of the excluded, disparaged Averroes in the visual *Triumphs of Thomas*, the Arab philosopher sits in honor amongst the Greek philosopher and a range of classical authorities, including Euclid, Ptolemy and Galen, and Avicenna (4.133). While Averroes is not the only Muslim located with such esteemed classical *auctores*, he is the only one accorded an epithet that justifies his location.²⁸ The divine grace bestowed upon Averroes and the anachronistic positioning of Muslims in Limbo have long perplexed critical readers of the *Commedia*. Brenda Deen Schildgen calls Dante’s treatment of the Arabic philosophers a “radical intellectual and theological gesture” on the part of the Floren-

29. Schildgen suggests the philosophers are paralleled with the theologians placed in Paradise 4 in a palinode for *Inferno* 4 where Dante aims to reconcile faith with reason through scripture, cf. 103: “faith is not side lined in favor of reason, nor reason undermined, but both are necessary components of the visionary understanding that scripture reveals”.

30. The location of this Parisian Master of Arts has been a perennial problem for critics attempting to ascertain Dante’s philosophical position on issues associated with Averroism. In the words of Etienne Gilson: “It may therefore be proved with equal ease either that Dante was an Averroist, since he put a notorious Averroist in Paradise, or that Siger was no longer an Averroist when Dante put him in Paradise, since Dante was not an Averroist and yet put him there” 225. It must be remembered that the term Averroism and Averroist is misleading; they developed as pejorative terms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and were applied to the thirteenth century by Renan in the late nineteenth-century. The idea Averroism has been untangled by a number of scholars, including Marenbon, van Steenberghen, who advocates instead for the term Radical Aristotelian, and Giglioli, 1-37; cf. also Bianchi for an excellent examination of Dante’s so-called Averroism and criticism on the subject.

31. Cited from the commentary to *Inferno* 4.144 by *L’Ottimo Commento* (Pisa, 1827–29) as found in the [Dante Dartmouth Project](#): “had not confessed to Christ.” See also the commentary to *Inferno* 4.144 by Benvenuto da Imola (Florence, 1887) as found in the [Dante Dartmouth Project](#). It is striking to note that a number of commentators do not take issue with Dante’s slight theological transgressions, but are careful to note that Averroes was a ‘saracenus’. Such a reference is often supported with the mention that Averroes lived in Spain, and in the case of the commentator of the *L’Ottimo Commento*, Spain and Morocco, in a possible allusion to some

tine poet’s wider aim to reconcile faith with reason through scripture (Schildgen 97).²⁹ Dante is cognizant of the fact that the Arabic philosophers he admires do not have the theological awareness to raise them any further than the highest point in *Inferno*, yet their understanding of reason is an essential component of understanding scripture. As a Muslim, therefore, Averroes falls short of receiving the “luce eterna” (*Paradiso* 10.136), the eternal light conferred upon the condemned heretic and so-called Averroist, Siger of Brabant who, in another radical gesture, is placed with Aquinas in *Paradise*.³⁰

Such a nuanced conclusion is not quite reached by the early commentators of the *Commedia*, including Dante’s foremost literary devotee, Boccaccio. In 1373, the Florentine civic authorities commissioned Boccaccio to deliver a series of public lectures on the *Commedia* at the church of Santo Stefano di Badia. The short-lived *Lecturae Dantis*, delivered between 1373 and 1374, only covered the first 17 cantos of *Inferno* and included a literal and allegorical reading of *Inferno* 4. While Boccaccio acknowledges the invaluable contribution Averroes makes to the study of Aristotle, he expresses extreme discomfort at his location in Limbo. For Boccaccio, Dante violates canon law in gracing Averroes the status of a virtuous pagan. Averroes, along with Avicenna and Saladin, are irrefutably *ignorantes iuris*, who “must not be given the same punishment that the innocents receive” (*Expositiones* 248; cf. Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*). Similar concerns are expressed by the early commentators of the *Divine Comedy*. For the anonymous commentator of *L’Ottimo Commento* produced in 1333, Averroes “non confessòe Cristo” a contention echoed by Benvenuto da Imola toward the end of the century, who notes Averroes and Avicenna lived after Christianity was revealed and thus, did not believe.³¹ The commentators enforce the notion of Averroes as an *ignorans iuris*, as defined by Boccaccio, in spite of his standing as the Great Commentator. Such critique of Averroes demonstrates the multivalent reception that his figure accorded in fourteenth century Italy but more importantly, it sheds greater light on Bonaiuto’s melancholic Averroes. In the Spanish Chapel Averroes is silenced and excluded from the philosophic company not only as a result of his function as Aquinas’ scholastic adversary, but because as a Muslim philosopher, he remains wilfully ignorant to the Christian *Via Veritatis*. Seen from this light, the image of the pensive and spiritually lethargic Averroes is no longer “topical and pointed” as Meiss remarks, but an image that also resonates with contemporary ambiguous attitudes found outside of a strictly Dominican purview (Meiss

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understanding of Averroes’ later exile to Marrakesh, where he died c. 10 December 1198. See Guido da Pisa, *L’Ottimo Commento*, as found in the [Dante Dartmouth Project](#). On

the historical figure of Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd, cf. Urvoy; Fakhry.

103). Bonaiuto however, further consolidates Averroes' position as an *ignorans iuris* by positioning him between the figures of Arius and Sabellius. Aside from a similar configuration in a panel painting found in the library of the Dominican priory of San Marco in Florence where Averroes sits with Sabellius on his right and William of St Armour on his left, all of whom are identified by name, critics have not explored other potential sources for Bonaiuto's unusual choice and arrangement of arch-heretics (figures 10 and 11). Turning to Dante, however, we find that this has a precise literary equivalent in the *Commedia* which can explain Averroes' position as both a heterodox philosopher and a Muslim heretic.

In *Paradiso* 13, Dante reaches the pinnacle of the cosmos in ascending the Heaven of the Sun. Composed of four *canti* guided by Thomas Aquinas, who emphasizes the harmony and order of the Christian universe, the Heaven of the Sun positions Aquinas above the crown of blessed souls (*Paradiso* 10.82–148). As a permanent reminder of his position as a champion against heresy, Aquinas overlooks a constellation of blessed figures, including the condemned Averroist, Siger of Brabant, Boethius and the Venerable Bede (cf. Cornish 93). The literary iconography bears a striking parallel to the enthroned Aquinas who sits in triumphant majesty overlooking the sacred and secular arts in the Spanish Chapel *Triumph of Thomas*. In addition, it also provides us with an image of Aquinas standing above the heresiarchs Arius and Sabellius. At the closing of *Paradiso* 13, Aquinas issues a warning against making and taking judgements based on scripture skewed by heretics such as Sabellius and Arius,

Sì fé Sabellio e Arrio e quelli stolti
 Che furon come spade a le Scritture
 In render torti li diritti volti.
 Non sien le genti, ancor troppo sicure
 A giudicar, sì come quel che stima (*Paradiso* 1.127–132)³²

32. Frank's translation renders a closer meaning, "Thus did Sabellius and Arius, and those fools / Who were to the scriptures like blades, / In rendering straight countenances distorted, / Moreover, let folk not be too secure in judgement, / Like one who should count the ears / In the field before they are ripe" (Frank 171–72).

Aquinas' warning is predicated on the notion that these Christian heretics take the familiar role of ancient theologians in order to skew scripture like swords striking through and distorting truth, "spade a le Scritture" (128). While Arius and Sabellius are not present in the Heaven of the Sun, the invocation brings to mind an image of Aquinas standing above their figures in a manner that echoes the visual configuration in the Spanish Chapel *Triumph of Thomas*. Furthermore, as the work of Maria Esposito Frank demonstrates, there is an



Figure 10. Dominican Priory (mid-fifteenth century). Florence, San Marco (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).

Figure 11. Averroes (detail) in Dominican Priory (mid-fifteenth century). Florence, San Marco (Photo credit: Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto).



even greater parallel between the visual and literary composition that aligns *Paradiso* 13 with *Inferno* 28. In a recent study, Esposito Frank reveals that the same violent imagery of swords striking through scripture that “equate Arius and Sabellius to concave blades that, while mirroring, crook the straight face of the scriptures” (172) is also found in *Inferno* 28. The devil’s sword that continues to split open the bodies of Muhammad and ‘Ali in the carnal and torturous punishment meted out to them is described using the same imagery as the concave blade that Arius and Sabellius use to strike through Christian orthodox truth: “un diavolo è qua dietro che n’accisma / sì crudelmente, al taglio della spada” (*Inferno* 28.37).³³ Muhammad’s affiliation to Christian heresy is reinforced with the ‘spada’ that splices through him, which is the same blade used to describe the crooked words of the Christian heretics who are invoked beneath Aquinas in a pointed warning against heresy. Moreover, the imagery of deep cuts that reflects religious schism aligns Muhammad and ‘Ali with Arianism in particular. The parallels between the figure of Arius and Muhammad, since the time of Eulogius, are conditioned on the notion that they both considered negators of “the dogmas of Trinity and Incarnation” (Esposito Frank 170). In the *Commedia*, the ripped body of Muhammad echoes the image of Arius’ unholy death, torn in the torso in a public latrine.

Esposito Frank’s revelatory examination of the imagistic parallels between the depiction of Christian heresy and Islam in the *Commedia* are critical to reading Bonaiuto’s assembly of Averroes with Arius and Sabellius. Here, Averroes becomes a purveyor of philosophical “spade a le Scritture” (128), charged with causing a considerable rift in natural philosophy and theology comparable to the religious schism conferred upon Islam in Dante’s *Inferno*. Islam’s supposed distortion of Christian truth corresponds with Averroes’ distortion of Aristotelian philosophy; both notions are predicated on an understanding that faith and reason have been intentionally distorted by the irrationalism ascribed to Islam and to Averroes in particular. It is necessary to note that Bonaiuto consciously chooses to depict Averroes, instead of the Prophet Muhammad, in order to make a visual statement about religious heresy. A reason for this lies not only in the Aquinas-Averroes iconographic formula that Bonaiuto is drawing on, but because medieval western iconography lacked a fixed visual stereotype for the Prophet Muhammad. Few visual depictions of Muhammad exist in medieval western art and when they do appear, they are always underscored with a textual explanation without

33. Again, Esposito Frank provides a closer translation: “A devil is here behind that fashions us / so cruelly, putting again to the edge / of his sword each of this throne” (166–67).

34. Strickland's study examines four of these portraits, each a singular and unique example from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: Muhammad as man in a copy of Matthew Paris' *Chronica Major*, the image of Muhammad as a "human-fish" in the *Liber generationis Mahumet*, Muhammad as the "Beast of the Earth" in a copy of a Franciscan commentary on the Apocalypse and Muhammad as a golden idol found in a copy of Jean de Vigny's French translation of Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*; cf. "Meanings of Muhammad" 147–51. Strickland suggests that these images were predicated on similar Latin polemical approaches to the mutable *pseudo-propheta*, and produced for the same learned audiences that ascribed, perpetuated and disputed the definition of Islam as a heresy in Latin scholastic writings, which is all the more fitting considering a depiction of a Muhammad as a "monstrous hybrid human-fish" appears in the pseudo-historical *Liber generationis Mahumet*, a treatise contained in Peter of Cluny's Toledan Collection; cf. "Meanings of Muhammad" 127 and 131.

35. Polzer demonstrates that the mural makes explicit assertions of Muhammad's heresy as allied to a portrait of the antipope, Nicholas V; cf. "Aristotle, Mohammad and Nicholas V in Hell".

which "there is no way of knowing whom the figure represents" (Strickland 190).³⁴ Of note, however, are the depictions of Muhammad found in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century large scale mural paintings dedicated to visual adaptations of Dante's *Commedia*, including an illustration of *Inferno* produced for the Strozzi di Mantova Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, by Bernardo (Nardo) di Cione, a decade before Andrea di Bonaiuto began working on the Spanish Chapel. Considered to be "the most faithful and complete visualization of Dante's *Inferno*" (Coffey 53), the fresco methodically visualized each canto, including canto 28 and contains a portrait of Muhammad that depicts him in accordance with Dante's literary iconography of the torturous *contrapasso* meted out to the Prophet and his nephew, albeit difficult to observe because of floodwater damage to the decoration in 1966. However, according to Heather Coffey, the image resembles another wall painting of the *Commedia* by Buonamico Buffalmacco, dated c. 1366 to 1341, which is significant because here, the artist chose to depict a turban-clad, bearded Muhammad "with the display of such a passive and indifferent demeanour" (Coffey 60) that he resembled the motif of the languid Averroes in Lippo Memmi's *Triumph of Thomas*. The iconographic similarities are so great that critical scholarship perpetually mistook him for the Arab philosopher, suggesting even the most astute of viewers could read an image of a heretical Arab prophet as a heterodox Arab philosopher.³⁵

Yet in choosing to depict Averroes, instead of the Prophet, Bonaiuto does not diminish the multivalent meaning ascribed to the image. Julian Gardner's remarks that "learned programmes presuppose learned audiences" (129) is evident in Bonaiuto's distinct image of Averroes and suggests the Dominican friars of the chapter house would have immediately understood that the Arab philosopher represented both a heterodox philosopher and a Muslim heretic. Furthermore, it also brings new light to recent critical scholarship, as Suzanne Conklin Akbari aptly notes:

In the great age of Islamic learning, when Western scientists looked admiringly on Avicenna ... and Western philosophers referred to Averroes simply as 'the Commentator', irrationality could not be imputed to Muslims at large, but only (at best) to the supposed irrationality of their religion (283).

In spite of the Latin West's appropriation of Arabic literature, philosophy, science and medicine, the contrast between the rational Christian and the irrational Muslim was a consistent trope in polemical tracts and such iconographic programmes as that of the chapter house of Santa Maria Novella. Such irrationalism was often targeted towards portraits of the Prophet Muhammad, vilified as the *pseudo-propheta* in both literary and visual portraits – Arabic philosophers were rarely, if ever, of concern. Yet, the image of Averroes whose mere presence in Andrea di Bonaiuto's *Triumph of Thomas* demonstrates his position as a transcultural figure, also suggests that by the fourteenth century at least, irrationality could be imputed to the Great Commentator.

In reading Bonaiuto's distinct image alongside *the* early commentators of Dante's *Commedia*, it is clear that a similar ambiguous approach to Averroes was current across Italian *Trecento* culture. While Averroes was celebrated as the Great Commentator and held to acclaim by Latin scholastics, including and especially Aquinas, Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola and others, could not divorce Averroes' standing as an Aristotelian philosopher from his religion in the same manner that Bonaiuto displays Averroes as both a heterodox philosopher and a Muslim heretic. Indeed, it is important to remember that even Memmi's choice of Averroes speaks to the wider reception of him as a notable and recognizable Aristotelian philosopher, which is ultimately the very reason for his existence in the paintings discussed. Moreover, this is the reason for the scornful treatment he receives exclusively in a Dominican context. Each of the changes made to the figure of Averroes from the iconographic formula established by Memmi, suggests that Bonaiuto intended to target Averroes' religious heresy in a pointed and precise manner suitable to a Dominican chapter house and friary. This speaks to the cultural value issued upon the figure of Averroes, who could garner both praise and in this context, ridicule; whose figure enabled a warning against religious heresy to be made and seen with greater significance than either an image of Muhammad or indeed, the absence of any figure, would allow. Moreover, that Gozzoli turns to the stylistic features established by Memmi and not Bonaiuto in order to create his fifteenth-century *Triumph of Thomas* further demonstrates the unique features of the pensive, condemned Averroes who sits at the heart of a celebration of Thomas Aquinas and Latin scholasticism.

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