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**Preaching Dante's *Commedia* in Fifteenth-Century Europe:  
The *Peregrinus cum angelo***

**Research topic**

My research investigates the early diffusion of Dante's *Commedia* outside Italy via sermons and its role in public religious discourse. This aims to shed light on the history of the reception of Dante and on the ways in which an Italian masterpiece crossed the Alps and progressively became a shared European heritage. The focus of the research is on the *Peregrinus cum angelo*, an anonymous fifteenth-century sermon collection, which has remained almost entirely unexplored by scholars. However, three characteristics make this sermon collection highly interesting for my purposes. First, the *Peregrinus* presents a very creative re-telling of Dante's poem by adopting his itinerary through hell, purgatory and paradise as narrative framework for an entire Lenten sermon collection. Second, these sermons comment extensively on the *Commedia*, suggesting a connection with the contemporary Italian practice of public lectures on Dante's work. Third, the *Peregrinus*, though being manifestly elaborated in Italy, found an unexpected diffusion in Germany. The fact that friars outside Italy in the early fifteenth century copied sermons based on Dante greatly enrich our understanding of the early international reception of the *Commedia*. Finally, this research provides an excellent case study for a sharper interpretation of the role of preaching in the circulation of ideas and texts in late medieval society.

**Purpose and results of the research travel**

The travel bursary generously awarded to me by the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature allowed me to complete the survey of the witnesses of the *Peregrinus* by visiting four libraries in the South of Germany during the period from the 5th to the 13th of August 2015. This gave me the possibility to work with eleven manuscripts in Eichstätt, Munich, and Nurnberg. In this way, I could identify which manuscripts actually contain the text of the *Peregrinus*. In order to do so, it was necessary to directly inspect the manuscripts, since a few of them lack a comprehensive description in the catalogues. The *Peregrinus cum angelo* results present in seven of the manuscripts that I have consulted. Moreover, another manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 9728) shows a peculiar occurrence. Here, the text of the *Peregrinus* is merged with another Lenten sermon collection – the *Quadragesimale viatoris* – thus virtually creating a new and independent version.

The study of these manuscripts confirmed both the dissemination of the *Peregrinus* in the south of Germany and the dynamic of the transmission of this text. This appears particularly evident in the presence or rather absence of the vernacular verses of Dante's poem. Some manuscripts present the Italian verses, which however are often less numerous than in the original version of the *Peregrinus* (provisionally, I identify it with the version that is in Padua, Biblioteca Civica, D 1722). Other manuscripts eliminate the Italian quotations completely, although they still refer to Dante (who sometimes is labelled as «poeta fulgaris») and use his description of the afterlife. In some cases, the copyists just noted that they omitted the Italian quotation «propter carentiam intellectum» or «causa brevitatem». Yet, the copyist of one manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 3549) proved to be quite interested in Dante's poem, since – although he had copied a version without vernacular quotations – later on he added few of them as marginal glosses. Evidently, he had the possibility to consult another manuscript, and he decided to re-integrate the poem in the sermons. The interplay between Latin and vernacular is further enriched by the presence not only of Italian verses but also of German sentences and words within the text of the sermons. This is at least the case with one manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 9728), which witnesses the attempts to adapt the text to the actual audience of the sermons. In different forms, several of the manuscripts that I consulted unfold traces of the way in which the text was used and adapted to the different local contexts. For instance, a manuscript originally held in the library of the Dominican convent in Eichstätt (Eichstätt, Universitätsbibliothek, 220) adds St Richard the Pilgrim to the list of saints who are praised for their life of poverty, and St Richard was the father of the local patron, St Willibard, first bishop of Eichstätt. Moreover, the lasting use of the text can be proved by the material features of some of the manuscripts. For instance, a 1503 woodcut had been glued on the reverse of the front cover of a manuscript (Munich, Universitätsbibliothek, 8° Cod. 344), thus proving that the *Peregrinus* was still used by some preachers at the dawn of the sixteenth-century, almost one century after its composition.

To conclude, the research carried out during this travel not only confirmed the information that I had collected in a preliminary survey of other five manuscripts of the *Peregrinus*, but it greatly enriched and made more nuanced my understanding of the complex and intriguing issues connected with the composition, transmission, and dissemination of this fascinating Dantesque sermon collection, which contributed – in a peculiar way – to the early diffusion of the *Commedia* outside Italy. Thanks to the generous support of the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, this travel allowed me to draw a first map of the manuscript tradition of the *Peregrinus cum angelo* and to lay the foundations for its proper study, which I will conduct during my post-doc research.