

“Mirror of Divine Splendour”. On Polished White Marble and Alabaster in Dante’s “Divine Comedy”

From the ancient times mirror was connected with the Sun – symbol of divinity, and the primary source of both physical (*lumen*) and metaphysical light (*lux*)². According to the medieval Neoplatonic and Pseudo-Dionysian philosophical traditions, the light radiates and penetrates the whole world and reflects itself as divine splendour (*candor* or *splendor*) in various cosmic and earthly bodies acting as mirrors³. It was Dante Alighieri, who expressed this idea as Christian mystery in an extremely profound way in the pages of his main work, the *Divine Comedy*. This epic, and in the opinion of the Poet himself, “sacred poem” (*Par.*, XXV, 1), one of the most celebrated and inspiring medieval texts, has been praised in the most recent Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis *Candor lucis aeternae* (“Splendour of Light Eternal”), dedicated to the seventh centenary of the death of Dante Alighieri⁴. It is not merely an accident that the letter was

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² On metaphysics of light in Dante’s works – see: J. A. Mazzeo, *Dante’s Sun Symbolism*, “*Italica*” 33 (1956) No. 4, pp. 243–246; J. A. Mazzeo, *Light Metaphysics: Dante’s “Convivio” and the letter to Can Grande Della Scala*, “*Traditio*” Vol. 14 (1958), pp. 191–229; S. A. Gilson, *Light Reflexion, Mirror Metaphors, and Optical Framing in Dante’s Comedy: Precedents and Transformation*, “*Neophilologus*” 83 (1999), pp. 241–252.

³ J. A. Mazzeo, *Light Metaphysics: Dante’s “Convivio” and the letter to Can Grande Della Scala*, pp. 191–229; J. A. Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in “Dante’s Comedy”*, Westport (Connct.) 1977, pp. 35–42; S. A. Gilson, *Light Reflexion, Mirror Metaphors...*, pp. 245–246.

⁴ Apostolic Letter “*Candor Lucis Aeternae*” of the Holy Father Francis on the Seventh Centenary of the Death of Dante Alighieri, “*Bollettino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*”, 2012.03.25, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/25/0181/00393.html#ing>; D. Alighieri, *The Di-*

promulgated on the Feast of the Annunciation to Mary and Incarnation of Jesus (March 25th), for he identified himself with the eternal light of the world and light of life (J. 8, 12), the source of its emanation and vision of the transcendental incarnate God⁵.

To illustrate the symbolic meaning of the divine light underlining the relation of the mirror and “divine splendour” St. Paul recalled the scene when Moses spoke to Israelites after his descent from Sinai (II Cor. 3, 7–18). His face was so shiny that he had to veil it. Christians, however, do not need such a veil, because they “all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord” (II Cor. 3, 18).

According to the ancient and medieval Neoplatonic thought the mirror (*speculum*) is a looking glass and rhetorical metaphor reflecting the light, both natural (corporeal) and immaterial (*divine*), and its brilliance or splendour (*splendor* or *candor*)⁶. In the Augustinian metaphorical and typological exegetic tradition, based on pagan and Christian sources alike, there are the mirrors of the soul or mind. The first refers to the soul “in which the archetypal ideas are most properly imaged, preparing for the mirrors known as compendium of knowledge and for mirrors of idealized virtue”⁷. “The mirror of the mind, where the shadow world of the senses may be reflected, giving a basis [...] for the mirrors which warned of the transience of this world [...]. The mirror of the mind when it attends to religious truth; in this connection Holy Scripture is called a mirror, from which are drawn exemplars or paragons of holy living”⁸. This scriptural exegetic tradition created a firm ground for the Christological interpretation of the *wisdom* strictly in the terms of the Neoplatonic philosophy as the transcendental divine light, because “wisdom [...], is the brightness that streams from everlasting light, the flawless mirror of the active power and the image of his goodness” (*Wisdom*, 7, 27)⁹.

vine Comedy, Vol. III: *Paradise*, transl. with an introduction, notes, and commentary by M. Musa, Penguin Books 1986, p. 295. All citations from this translation, unless otherwise indicated.

5 All Bible citations from the *New English Bible with Apocrypha*, Oxford-Cambridge 1970. To express this crucial for Christians idea of the conception of Christ, which did not effect the Virgin’s virginity, Dante used as an analogy well known medieval concept of “sunlight penetrating water without disturbing its substance” (*Par. II*, 34–36), cit. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, Vol. 3: *Paradiso*, ed. and transl. by R. M. Durling, Oxford 2011, p. 47 and p. 56 (Note 35–36).

6 R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum in Medieval Literature*, “Speculum”, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan. 1954), p. 109. For a comprehensive study, see R. Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press 2009.

7 R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, p. 105.

8 R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, p. 105.

9 J. Pelikan, *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought*, New York 1962, espec. pp. 34, 79, 96.

The mirror (*speculum*) as title-metaphor was one of the most popular literary genres in the Middle Ages, referring to a compendium of knowledge initially to philosophy and theology, but also to biographies of the saints and especially moral and didactic treatises¹⁰. Mark Musa described Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as “a poem that captures an entire civilization [...], for in it is mirrored a rather complete picture of the medieval European world”¹¹. Indeed, Dante uses the figure of mirror in various metaphorical aspects, especially in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*¹².

At the beginning of this rich mirror-like approach with its various symbolic and anthropological meanings were words of St. Augustine himself that “all which has been written [in the Scripture – ZB] is our mirror” (*Omnia enim que hic conscripta sunt, speculum nostra sunt*)¹³. Later Hugh of St. Victor has re-worked this thought describing “the twofold function of the mirror: to show us what we are and what we ought to be”¹⁴. Precisely in this anthropological context, Dante Alighieri used the *speculum* (*specchio*) in the verses of the Canto IX (94–102) in the *Purgatory*, where he described how Lady Lucia (St. Lucy) guides him and Virgil to the three steps before the gate of the *Purgatory*:

We reached the steps. White marble was the first,
And polished to the glaze of a looking glass:
I saw myself reflected as I was.

The second one was deeper dark than perse,
Of rough and crumbling, fire-corroded stone,
With cracks across its surface – length and breadth.
The third one, lying heavy at the top,
Appeared to be of flaming porphyry,
Red as the blood that spurts out from a vein.¹⁵

10 Ritamary Bradely presented a comprehensive study of the *speculum* as a literary genre – see: R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, pp. 100–115; also: R. Grabes, *The Mutable Glass...*, pp. 38–62.

11 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Vol. II: Purgatory*, transl., with an introd., notes, and comment, by M. Musa, Penguin Books 1985, p. IX. On mirrors (*speculum, specchio, specchio, miraglio or spera*) used metaphorically in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* – see H. D. Austin, *Dante and Mirrors*, “Italice” 21 (1944) No. 1, pp. 13–17; R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, p. 114.

12 S. A. Gilson, *Light Reflexion, Mirror Metaphors...*, pp. 241–252.

13 R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, p. 103, note 20; St. Augustini Episcopi, *Enarratio in Psalmum XXX, Sermo III, Patrologia Latina*, XXXVI, col. 248. See also: R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, pp. 102–104.

14 R. Bradley, *Backgrounds of the Title Speculum...*, p. 111.

15 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Vol. II: Purgatory*, pp. 99, 105 (Notes).

A guardian angel of God with a naked sword (Purg. IX, 80–84) allows them to get through this threshold. The three steps represent three of the four stages of the Sacrament of Penance: Confession, Contrition, and Satisfaction¹⁶. The lowest step, standing for the Confession, is made of the highly polished mirror-like white marble. It serves Dante as “the clear mirror of conscience” (*videbat se clare in speculo conscientiae*)¹⁷.

The splendour (*splendor* or *candor*) is created by rays of light reflecting in different polished and subsequently shining materials or bodies, such as white marble or alabaster, but also water, glass, ivory, precious stones and metals¹⁸. In Dante’s own words from the same Canto, the guardian angel had “face too splendid for my eyes—I looked away!” (Purg. IX, 81)¹⁹. These verses evoke the previously quoted verses of St. Paul’s II Letter to Corinthians about Moses’s face illuminated by the “divine splendour”, which was so bright that he had to put a veil over it to allow the Israelites gaze at him (II Cor. 3, 7–18). Dante experienced a similar reaction seeing the angel’s “naked sword; so dazzling were the rays reflected thence, each time I tried to look I could not see” (Purg. IX, 83–84)²⁰. In Canto XV, the poet experienced even more dazzling radiance of light, which comes from the Angel of Generosity and reflects in opposite direction like from the surface of water or glass (Purg. XV, 10–30)²¹. In these verses, water or glass are not only medium through which rays of light penetrate, but they also act as mirror reflecting them²².

From the Classical antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages light as the property of sun, which itself is a symbol of transcendental God, is a metaphor of metaphysical, (intellectual) immaterial light. In Christian tradition, this sacred concept derives from of the Scriptures where Christ called himself “the light of the world, no follower of mine shall wander in the dark; he shall have the light

16 J.S. Carroll, *Prisoners of Hope: An Exposition of Dante’s Purgatorio*, London 1906, pp. 141–144.

17 J.S. Carroll, *Prisoners of Hope*, p. 144; Benvenuti de Rambaldis de Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldighierij Comoediam*, T. 3, Florence 1887, p. 265. In the same context “squared marble stones” on Gethsemane acting as a mirror, cit. transl. H. Kessler, *Speculum*, “Speculum” Vol. 86, No. 1 (Jan. 2011), p. 10, Note 30.

18 R. Grabes, *The Mutable Glass...*, p. 72. On mirror-like polished marble – see: L. Mannoni, *Marble: The History of a Culture*, New York 1985, pp. 142–143.

19 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, pp. 98, 105 (Notes). According to Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagite, “the angel is an image of God. He is a manifestation of the hidden light. He is a mirror” – Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, transl. by C. Luiheid with collaboration of P. Rorem, preface by R. Roques, Introd. by J. Pelikan, J. Leclercq, and K. Froehlich, New York, Mahwah 1987, p. 89 (*The Divine Names*, 724B).

20 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, p. 98, 105 (Notes).

21 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, pp. 161–162, 167 (Notes). For angels as crystal mirrors of divine light – see: H. Kessler, *Speculum*, p. 11.

22 See Note 4 in this article.

of life” (J. 8, 12)²³. Dante refers to these verses in the description of Christ as the Sun, a “living light” and “so bright translucent substance” (Par. XXIII, 28–32):

I saw, above a myriad of lights,
One Sun that lit them all, even as our own sun
Illuminates the stars of his domain;

And through its living light there poured the glow
Of its translucent substance, bright, so bright
That my poor eyes could not endure the sight.²⁴

In Classical Greece, sparkling luminosity of the most favoured the Parian white marble was described with the same terms used for precious stones emitting light²⁵. Democritus used terms “bright” and “shining” as synonyms for white colour²⁶. Pliny the Elder mentioned in case of the statue of Hecate in Ephesus made of white marble that “in studying this statue people were warned by the sacristans to be careful of their eyes; so intense is the glare of the marble”²⁷. Vergil, Dante’s guide throughout the *Inferno* and *Prurgatory*, a Platonist himself, in the description of the glorious look of Aeneas appearing before queen Dido mentioned Parian marble (*Pariusve lapis*) among the most precious materials such as ivory, gold or silver (*Aeneid*, I)²⁸.

23 Clement of Alexandria has stated in commenting the Transfiguration scene that Christ “is the light on high and he is that light revealed in flesh” – L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, Oxford 1996, p. 120.

24 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradise*, pp. 272, 276 (Notes). See also: Note 4 in the article.

25 According to Pliny the Elder Parian marble was allegedly to derive its name (*lychnites*), either because it was quarried in the galleries by light of oil lamps, or it “should mean “lamp-like”. The latter term might well refer to the luminous quality of the surface of this marble – see: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, transl. by H. Rackham, W. H. S. Jones and D. E. Eichholz, Cambridge (Mass.), London 1962, Vol. X, pp. 11–13 (Book XXXVI, 14, Note a).

26 See: L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, p. 53; M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, “The Cambridge Classical Journal” 52 (2006), pp. 5–6.

27 Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, pp. 24–27 (Book XXXVI, 32).

28 “The cloud around the broke, dissolved in air,
Illumining Aeneas, like god,
Light radiant around his face and shoulders,
And Venus gave him all the bloom of youth.
Its glow, its liveliness, as the artist adds
Luster to ivory, or sets in gold,
Silver or marble.”

The Aeneid of Virgil, a vers transl. by R. Humphries, London-New York 1951, p. 24 (Book I). J. Pollini, N. Herz, K. Polikreti, Y. Maniatis, *Parian lychnites and the Prima Porta statue: New scientific tests and the symbolic value of the marble*, “Journal of Roman Archaeology” 11 (1998), p. 283.

Highly polished marble because of its bright whiteness (*candor*), ability of shining (*splendor*, *luminosity*), and translucency (*perspicuitas*) became one of the most prestigious materials used in the Classical antiquity, mentioned along with the ivory and bronze²⁹. Mark Bradley, examining marble metaphors in the literature of the early Roman Empire, concluded that “polish was indeed a defining characteristic of marble in antiquity”³⁰. Among other kinds of white marbles, it was high quality marble from Luna (*marmor lunense*), later known as from Carrara in the Apuan Alps, which gave the city of Rome during the early imperial era “a physical and ideological facelift”³¹. Pliny the Elder in his *Historia naturalis* noticed that this marble is even whiter than the Parian *lychnites*³². Its brilliant whiteness (*candor* or *candidus color*) and translucency (*perspicuitas*) similar to the other imported white marbles, especially the Parian *lychnites*, but also Pentelic and Proconnesian marbles, were decisive to enjoy their popularity in this city³³. The extensive use of various polished polychrome marbles gave Rome the name of the “marble city” (*urbs marmorea*)³⁴. Dio Cassius, however, concluded that this statement “did not thereby refer literally to the appearance of its buildings, but rather to the strength of the empire”³⁵. Certainly, Augustus’s architectural activity, was to re-make Rome as a capital *pro maiestate imperii ornata*³⁶. Referring to the properties of white marble, John

29 Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, pp. 36–37 (Book XXXVI, 46); M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, pp. 9–12. John Gage noticed that “the pavements of Pergamon and Morgantina were ground smooth, waxed and polished [...] to produce a highly reflective surface” – J. Gage, *Colour and Culture. Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, Princeton 1993, p. 16. The predilection of the Romans to produce shiny, lustre surfaces in order to achieve splendour (*claritas*) revealed even in the wall paintings.

30 Mark Bradley cited the frequently quoted not quite accurate description of marble in Oxford Classical Dictionary: “according to the ancients, marble was any stone which could be highly polished” – M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, p. 5, note 15; also: M. Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Medieval Mediterranean*, Leiden–Boston 2009, p. 27.

31 M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, p. 2–3. Strabo in his *Geography* characterized the marble in quarries from Luna as “both white and marked with green, so numerous and large, as to furnish tablets and columns of one block; and most of the material for the fine works, both in Rome and their cities, is furnished from hence. The transport of the marble is easy, as the quarries lie near to the sea, and from the sea they are conveyed by the Tiber” – *The Geography of Strabo*, literary transl. with notes by H. C. Hamilton, W. Falconer, Vol. 1, London 1854, p. 330 (5. 2).

32 Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, pp. 11–13 (Book XXXVI, 14).

33 M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, p. 10 and p. 12.

34 M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, p. 6; K. S. Lamp, *A City of Marble: The Rhetoric of Augustan Rome*, Columbia 2013.

35 K. S. Lamp, *A City of Marble...*, p. 1; *Cassius Dio’s Roman History*, with an English translation by E. Foster, London, New York 1914, vol. 7, p. 69 (Book 56, 30).

36 M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, p. 6. According to Suetonius in his *De vita Caesarum*, well known in the Middle Ages and to Dante too, Augustus expressed a boast “I found

Pollini made a remark that “this luminosity is associated, too, with the bright and shining nature of the Golden Age (*saeculum aureum*) that Augustus had brought to the Roman world”³⁷. Indeed, the Augustan imperial and cultural rhetoric expressed itself in art and architecture as a method of visual communication³⁸. The famous statue of Augustus from Prima Porta is made of the favoured pure, sparkling and lucent white Parian *lychnites*³⁹. It recalls bronze statue of the *Doryphoros* (Spear Bearer) of Polykleitos. The rhetoric of stone and Polykleitos’s Classical *canon* suggest that they have been chosen to reflect the Roman virtues and moral values such as *auctoritas* or *dignitas*, but also “masculine purity, moral strength, and ideal graceful beauty (*decor supra verum*)”⁴⁰. Perhaps the equally impressive example of such rhetoric is the *Ara Pacis Augustae* with its architectural and sculptural structure, created entirely of the Luna stone⁴¹. According to Paul Zanker its “sculptural style and composition, inspired by classical reliefs, elevates the scene beyond the historical occasion into timeless sphere”⁴². Use of white marble was one of the intrinsic characteristics of the Augustan ideological program and its rhetoric. Precious metals and stones, especially marbles, played a significant role in creating his cult as deity associated with the sun and through it, with Apollo⁴³. The title “Augustus” given him by the Senate, implicated the radiant aura of the *augustness* (i.e. holiness, consecrated), traditionally related to Apollo⁴⁴. Suetonius described that

Rome build of bricks; but leave her clothed in marble” – Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars, II: Augustus*, transl. R. Graves, rev. with an introd. by M. Grant, Penguin Books 1989, p. 69 (XXVIII).

- 37 J. Pollini, *The Marble Type of the Statue of Augustus From Prima Porta*, [in:] *Paria Lithos: Parian Quarries, Marble and Workshops of Sculpture. Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Archaeology of Paros and the Cyclades, Paros, 2–5 October 1997*, ed. by D. U. Schilardi and D. Katsionopoulou, Athens 2000, p. 245; P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, transl. by M. Shapiro, Ann Arbor 1988, pp. 50–51, 167–172.
- 38 K. S. Lamp, *A City of Marble...*, pp. 1–6, 32–34, 38–57, 109–130.
- 39 J. Pollini, *The Augustus from Prima Porta and the Transformation of the Polykleitan Heroic Ideal: The Rhetoric of Art.*, [in:] *Polykleitos, the Doryphoros, and Tradition*, ed. by W. G. Moon, Medison (Wiss.) 1995, pp. 268 and 262–282; Pollini 2000, pp. 237–252.
- 40 J. Pollini, *The Augustus from Prima Porta...*, pp. 268 and 262–282.
- 41 K. S. Lamp, *A City of Marble...*, pp. 39–57.
- 42 P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus...*, p. 121. Jaś Elsner turning attention to this citation, noticed that “the naturalistic rendition of specific details (...), conveys an aura of likelihood and actuality on what is in fact a highly symbolic representation” – J. Elsner, *Cult and sculpture: sacrifice in the Ara Pacis Augustae*, “The Journal of Roman Studies” 81 (1991), p. 51.
- 43 P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus...*, pp. 47–53; J. Pollini, *The Gemma Augustea: Ideology, Rhetorical Imaginery, and the Construction of a “Dynastic narrative”*, [in:] *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art*, ed. by P. J. Holliday, Cambridge University Press 1993, pp. 281–284.
- 44 P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus...*, pp. 98–100. During the public appearances, Augustus used to wear Apollo’s laurel wreath – see: P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus...*, pp. 49–50. Horace identified Augustus with the Sun – see: Horace, *The Odes and Carmen Saeculare*, transl. by J. Conington, London 1872, p. 107 (4.2, 46–48).

“Augustus’s eyes were clear (*claros*) and bright (*nitidos*), and he liked to believe that they shone with a sort of divine radiance: it gave him profound pleasure if anyone at whom he glanced keenly dropped his head as though dazzled (*fulgorem*) by looking into sun“ (*Augustus*, II, 79)⁴⁵. It is significant that the rhetorical vocabulary of this fragment explicitly evokes description of the properties of translucent and polished materials, especially marbles used extensively during the years of his Principate. This visual epideictic discourse, based on the neoplatonic metaphorical interpretation of the sun, its light or radiance, and the achievements of the Classical Greek sculpture such as the *Doryphoros*, led to present Augustus not only as a deity, with its ritual and religious significance, but also as an exemplary figure of a citizen shining morally⁴⁶.

Despite the religious differences, the ideological legacy of the Classical antiquity and especially that of the Augustan Principate with its various neoplatonic symbolic factors, including the use of luminous and semi-translucent materials, had always been present in the late Christian Antiquity, Byzantium and throughout the Middle Ages⁴⁷. One of its aspects was adornment of the sacral buildings with the white marble and alabaster slabs⁴⁸. They came from the demolished old Roman sites, found locally or imported as a booty, but there were also used marbles from the local quarries⁴⁹. This process began to be more intense from about 1000 AD onward, clothing the Christendom, especially in Italy and Gaul “in a white garment of churches”⁵⁰. The white marble slabs cover the walls of the cathedrals in Verona (build 1123–1125) and Modena (build 1099–1184). The Classicism of their architectural forms and sculptural decoration re-

45 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*..., p. 98; J. Pollini, *The Gemma Augustea*..., p. 284.

46 P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*..., p. 52, also: pp. 57, 156–166, 245–247. Quoting Quintilian who called the *Doryphoros* “vir gravis et sanctus”, Zanker has stated that “the same words could serve as worthy description of Augustus” – P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*..., p. 250; J. Pollini, *The Gemma Augustea*..., pp. 267–276; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. Transformation of art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 161–172.

47 In the Byzantine poetry (rhetoric) and aesthetics the marble slabs’ “surface is translucent and reflective at the same time, shimmering and polychromatic”, cit. B. V. Pantcheva, *Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics*, “Gesta”, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2011), p. 96.

48 On the Classical rhetoric of material, particularly white marble, inherited and adopted by the Late Antique Christianity and Middle Ages – see: V. Ivanovici, *Divine Light Through Earthly Colours: Mediating Perception in Late Antique Churches* [in] *Colour and Light in Ancient and Medieval Art*, ed. by C. N. Duckworth and A. E. Sassin, Oxon and New York 2018, pp. 79–91, espec. 80–82. For white marble and alabaster slabs used for windows and wall panels in Hagia Sophia – see: N. Schibille, *Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine Aesthetic Experience*, Farnham (UK) and Burlington (US) 2014, pp. 67–68, 103–104.

49 M. Greenhalgh, *Marble Past*..., espec. pp. 10–11, 363–442.

50 This is how it was described by Benedictine monk Rudolf Glaber (ca. 985–1046) in his chronicle *Historiarum sue Temporis*, *Patrologia Latina*, T. 142, Liber III, Cap. IV, col. 651.

veals a connection with the Roman imperial past⁵¹. Strong classical influences are visible even more profoundly in Tuscany, at Lucca, Pisa, Siena, and Florence, native to Dante. The *Duomo* at Pisa had already been in the eleventh century covered with white marble slabs and reliefs from local quarries at Monte Pisano and looted classical fragments⁵². Its construction had been entrusted to Busketo (1063–1110), mentioned as the first architect (*operarius*) of the *opera*⁵³. A contemporary epitaph with the Latin text, placed in the facade of the *Duomo*, praises his *opus* that surpassed the fame of Daedalus (“Dark building of the labyrinth was your, O Daedalus, fame, but Busketo’s splendid temple surpass it, a church of marble white as snow has no peer, conceived entirely from Busketo’s talent”)⁵⁴. The text evokes not only the eulogies from the distant mythological and Classical past, emphasising the importance of white marble, but also the very classical self-awareness of the architect’s talent and skills.

Certainly, the white marble slabs covering the walls of Pisan *Duomo*, as in the other Tuscan churches, were smoothed and polished to gain glossy texture and translucency with the impression of depth⁵⁵. Such Classical, snow-like white surface received reliefs sculptured in the thirteenth century by Nicola Pisano (1220–1284) and his son Giovanni (c. 1248–1318), famous for their style, strongly evoking the early imperial relief-sculpture, as well as the French Gothic sculpture, itself also inspired by the same Roman Classical sculptural tradition⁵⁶. It is significant that in their works they used the local marble, as well as that from the newly re-opened, after several centuries of disuse, quarries in Carrara⁵⁷. Erwin Panofsky called Nicola Pisano “the greatest – and in a sense the last – of medieval classicists”, and Dante Alighieri was in similar sense the greatest clas-

51 A. McLean, *Romanesque Architecture in Italy*, [in:] *Romanesque Architecture, Sculpture and Painting*, ed. by R. Toman, Köln 1997, pp. 85 (San Zeno, Verona), p. 88 (Modena), p. 91 (Classicism).

52 M. Franzini and M. Lezzerini, *The Stones of Medieval Buildings in Pisa and Lucca Provinces (Western Tuscany, Italy)*. 1 – *The Monte Pisano Marble*, “European Journal of Mineralogy” (2003) No. 15, p. 222.

53 V. Torri, *Zeichen friedlicher und bewaffneter Wallfahrt in der Toskanischen Skulptur des 12. Jahrhunderts um Guilielmus und Biduinus*, PhD Diss. Hamburg Universität 1998, Text p. 10, Katalog p. 46, 71b.

54 *Nigra domus labyrinthus erat, tua Dedale laus est, at sua Busketum splendida templa probant, non habet exemplum niveo de marmore templum quod f(it) Busketi prorsus ab ingenio* – V. Torri, *Zeichen friedlicher und bewaffneter...*, Katalog p. 46, 71b.

55 L. Mannoni, *Marble: The History of a Culture*, pp. 142–143.

56 J. White, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1250–1400*, Pinguin Books 1966, pp. 39–43, 44–53 (Nicola Pisano), 55–64 (Arnolfo di Cambio), 68–88 (Giovanni Pisano).

57 M. Greenhalgh, *Marble Past...*, pp. 411–417, Note 315; L. Mannoni, *Marble: The History of a Culture*, pp. 212–214. Dante perceived the importance of Luni as a quarry of white marble in antiquity, for he mentioned Arnus, the Etruscan diviner who lived there in the early years of the Principate in the cave cut in the hills of white marble (*Inferno*, XX, 46–50) – see: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. I: *Inferno* 1984, pp. 252, 256.

sicist as the last scholastic medieval poet and scholar⁵⁸. Certainly, the Poet knew the works of Pisano family and Nicola's pupil Arnolfo di Cambio, inspired by the ancient Classical forms, for he could see them in Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Pistoia, Padua, and Rome⁵⁹.

Dante refers explicitly to the Classical Greek and Roman sculptural tradition, when he mentions Polyclete (Polykleite) in the description of the three reliefs depicting scenes with the virtue of humility carved in white marble. The first relief represents the Annunciation scene (Purg. X, 34–45), the second, King David dancing reverently before the Ark of the Covenant (Purg. X, 55–69), the third, the Emperor Trajan, who listens to the grievances of a poor widow (Purg. X, 73–93). In the Classical ekphrasis-like lapidary descriptions, Dante skilfully combines the ancient poetic rhetorical tradition with the rhetoric of Classical sculpture laying special emphasis on the brilliant whiteness of marble (Purg. X, 28–45 and 31, 38, 55, 72)⁶⁰. Both poets, Dante and Vergil, after passing the *Needle's eye* (Purg. X, 16), stand at the beginning of the first terrace of the Pride/Humility⁶¹. They see the high inner cliff made of pure white and flawless marble with the reliefs carved into it (to limit the citation to the Annunciation scene only):

And standing there, before we took a step,
I realized that all the inner cliff,
Which, rising sheer, offered no means to climb,

Was pure white marble; on its flawless face
Where carvings that would surely put to shame
Not only Polyclete but Nature too.

The angel who came down to announce on earth
The peace longed for by weeping centuries,

58 E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art*, New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London 1972, pp. 39 (Dante), 67–68 (Pisano). In a scholastic sense “the *Divine Comedy* may be regarded as a cathedral, the last” – G. Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980–1420*, Chicago 1983, p. 187.

59 J. White, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1250–1400*, pp. 39–91; G. F. Fiero, *Dante's Ledge of Pride: Literary Pictorialism and the Visual Arts*, “Journal of European Studies” 5 (1975) No. 1, pp. 10–12, 13–15.

60 Gloria F. Fiero made a remark that in the description of the reliefs, “Dante make use of pictorialism, a literary device which recalls or recreates a representational work of art, actual or imaginary” – G. F. Fiero, *Dante's Ledge of Pride: Literary Pictorialism and the Visual Arts*, p. 1. See also: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatorio*, ed. and transl. by R. Durling 2003, p. 169.

61 For the *Needle's eye*, see: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, pp. 107, 113.

Which broke the ancient ban and opened Heaven,

Appeared before our eyes: a shape alive,
Carved in an attitude of marble grace,
An effigy that could have spoken words.

One would have sworn that he was saying “Ave!”
For she who turned the key, opening for us
The Highest Love, was also figured there;

The outlines of her image carved the words
Ecce ancilla Dei, as clearly cut
As is the imprint of a seal on wax⁶².

Dante acknowledges that the reliefs were executed by God, “the Master-Craftsman”, “One for Whom no new thing can exist fashioned this art of visible speech – so strange to us who do not know it here on earth” (Purg. X, 94–96, 99)⁶³. Nature and men are only able to imitate God’s artistic activity, because the “reliefs represent a level of artistic achievement unknown to the viewer on earth”⁶⁴. Thus, even such a famous Classical Greek sculptor as Polykleite of Argos is not able to reach the level of God’s artistry⁶⁵.

62 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, p. 109. There are other carvings on the thirteen tomb slabs set on the bed of the rock of this ledge pavement “like on the church floor” depicting examples of the vice of Pride. Dante, however, does not describe them explicitly as made of white marble (Purg. XII, 10–63) – see: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, pp. 128–135.

63 Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory* 1985, pp. 111 and 116. In this Neoplatonic scholastic vision of Augustinian origin, in which “God is the great artificer”, who, thanks for his Wisdom, is “the author of all nature”, “from earthy to heavenly realities, from visible to the invisible” – St. Augustine, *Concerning The City of God, Against the Pagans*, a new transl. by H. Bettenson with an introd. By J. O’Meara, Penguin Books 1984, p. 454, 456, 458; G. F. Fiero, *Dante’s Ledge of Pride: Literary Pictorialism and the Visual Arts*, p. 7.

64 G. F. Fiero, *Dante’s Ledge of Pride: Literary Pictorialism and the Visual Arts*, p. 9.

65 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, pp. 111 and 116. His whole *oeuvre* is not extant and known from the texts of Roman authors and significantly, copies in white marble only. He is famous for inventing a Classical *canon* of body proportions with the *contrapposto* – see: R. Tobin, *The Canon of Polykleitos*, “Journal of Archaeology”, 79 (1975), pp. 307–321. Perhaps, his epitomized creation was the bronze statue of the *Doryphoros*, which became a model for the heroic marble statue of the divinized Emperor Augustus from Prima Porta in Rome and his imperial religious and ideological rhetoric – see: P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus...*, p. 249–250; J. Pollini, *The Gemma Augustea...*, pp. 262–282, espec. 267–276.

Dante Alighieri refers to alabaster as material in the *Divine Comedy* only once. In the *Paradise* (Par. XV, 19–24) he describes the meeting with the soul of his ancestor and crusader Cacciaguada:

So, from the right arm of the cross a star
Belonging to that brilliant constellation
Sped to the center, then, down to the foot,

And as it coursed the radial lines,
This gem contained its setting seemend
Like fire behind an alabaster screen⁶⁶.

Elsa Filosa in her article concluded that the source of the term “alabaster” in these verses is in the “On Minerals” (*De mineralibus*) of Albert the Great. He has stated that “among marbles, the white [kind – ZB] called alabaster is undoubtedly composed of great deal of transparent [material – ZB] (...) and the result is a most noble, sparkling colour in it”⁶⁷. Recently, however, Francesca Galli turned attention to the last verse of the above citation, which appeared in Bartholomaeus de Bononia’s philosophical tractatus *De Luce* and his sermons⁶⁸. This Franciscan scholar and preacher in vernacular, conceived in Latin his own philosophy of light, based on texts of the Classical, Arabic, and medieval authors, such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, St. Augustine, Robert Grosseteste, John Peckham, Roger Bacon, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas⁶⁹. He developed the concept of the physical light as analogy and metaphor for the spiritual and metaphysical light (*sub lucis similitudine*)⁷⁰. As a preacher, he pre-

66 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradise*, pp. 178, 179, 183 (Notes).

67 A. Magnus, *Book of Minerals*, transl. by D. Wyckoff, Oxford 1967, p. 45 (I, II, 3); E. Filosa, *Alberto Magno, Dante e le Pietre Preziose: Una nota su ambra et alabastro*, “Dante Studies” (2004) No. 122, pp. 173–180, espec. 176–177.

68 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia’s “De Luce” and Contemporary Preaching*, [in:] *Colour and Light in Ancient and Medieval Art*, eds. C. N. Duckworth, A. E. Sassini, Oxon and New York 2018, p. 132–144. It does not mean that Dante took directly this example from Bartholomaeus’s tractatus *De Luce*. He would rather know Bartholomaeus’s sermons or share the same historical and cultural environment for he was at Bologna in 1292–1294 – see: F. Galli, *Sub lucis similitudine. Ottica e teologia della luce in Bartolomeo de Bologna O.F.M.*, “Lettere Italiane”, Vol. 65, No 4 (2013), pp. 556 (Note 81) and 562; F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia’s “De Luce” and Contemporary Preaching*, p. 139.

69 Dante placed the souls of St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Solomon, Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, Orosius, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Bede, Richard of St. Victor, Siger of Brabant in the circle of the Wise and Learned in the *Paradise* (Par., X, 76–138) – see: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradise*, pp. 121–123, 127–132 (Notes).

70 He makes a careful distinction between both kinds of light – see: D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradise*, p. 135; F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia’s “De Luce” and Contemporary Preaching*, p. 134.

sented his theory in a practical, pastoral way; the properties of the sensual light, which reveal themselves in various earthly materials or bodies. This “spiritual optics” allowed him to “read” materials and objects, even of everyday usage (candles, alabaster sheets, precious stones, mirrors of various shapes, stained glass), in the various metaphorical contexts, and to create a mental “picture” of the divine, metaphysical reality. Therefore, in order to contemplate the spiritual things, it is necessary to start from that, what is visible in the material world⁷¹. It is interesting that the author devoted four paragraphs to shiny and enlightening materials and things, distinguishing four levels of their brightness in order to “spiritualize physical light and its [various – ZB] effects” and comparing them to the four levels of faith⁷².

At the first level there are “things which shine, and can be seen in the dark, but not enlighten other things (*lucent sed not ulluminant*), such as glass (*vitrum*)”⁷³. To compare them to the spiritual light, there are believers with the authentic faith, but they do not know and understand its principles, and are not able to teach or persuade this to the other people. In the same way at the second level of brightness, there are precious stones such as carbuncles or rubies “which shine and which also illuminate the surrounding area, making the rest visible (*allia faciunt videri*)”. To compare them to the spiritual light, there are believers with the authentic faith and they are able to teach or persuade this to the other people⁷⁴. At the third level, there are things to shine themselves and are able to illuminate the surrounding area, giving its light to other things, which, in turn are able to shine. As an example, Bartholomaeus mentioned “a flame (maybe a candle) behind an alabaster sheet: the flame shines in itself, illuminates the alabaster, and the alabaster itself diffuses light around it”. At the spiritual level there are “theologians and preachers (*doctores et praedicatores*), who have a pure faith and able to transmit it by knowledge, words and actions to the others, who in turn become lights for yet more people”⁷⁵. At the fourth level, there is actually the only one such source of light, namely the sun, which gives light and not receives it. On the spiritual level, only Christ as the *Prima Lux* or Sun of Justice is such a source of the purest light, faith, and enlightenment⁷⁶.

71 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia's "De Luce" and Contemporary Preaching*, pp. 132–135.

72 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia's "De Luce" and Contemporary Preaching*, p. 136, also pp. 132–133.

73 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia's "De Luce" and Contemporary Preaching*, p. 136.

74 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia's "De Luce" and Contemporary Preaching*, p. 136.

75 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia's "De Luce" and Contemporary Preaching*, pp. 135, 136.

76 F. Galli, *Bartholomaeus de Bononia's "De Luce" and Contemporary Preaching*, (Table 10.1); J. A. Mazzeo, *Light Metaphysics: Dante's "Convivio" and the letter to Can Grande Della Scala*, p. 208.

It is significant that the soul of the Pilgrim's ancestor, a knight, who died as a martyr in battle during the second crusade, ascended directly to the central Heaven (Par., XV, 139–148), to the fifth sphere of Mars⁷⁷. His soul, as the blessed one, shines not only “like fire behind an alabaster screen”, but also as “the holly mirror” which like angels reflects the light of God, i.e. splendour (Par. XVIII, 1)⁷⁸.

During the Middle Ages the term “alabaster” referred commonly to white marble and to real alabaster (*gypsum carbonate*)⁷⁹. In both cases, as in the Classical antiquity, it referred rather to its translucency and ability for polishing than to its whiteness⁸⁰. Indeed, Robert Grosseteste has expressed common in the Middle Ages opinion that “bright and copious light in a pure diaphanous medium is whiteness” (*lux igitur clara multa in perspicuo puro albo est*)⁸¹. Similarly, for Dante the highly polished and translucent materials, including white marble and alabaster, seemed to be metaphorically like “a cloud as brilliant [i.e. extreme whiteness – ZB], hard, and polished as a diamond struck by a ray

77 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradise*, pp. 182–183, 187–188 (Notes).

78 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradise*, pp. 213, 217 (Note 1). In the commentary to the above quoted verse, Benvenuto da Imola (d. 1388), interpreted the “gem” which, like a star or the *anima precioza* of alabaster, the whitest of marble, shines with the splendour of God (*et declarat transcursum ipsius splendoris per simile dicens: che parve fuoco dietro ad alabastro. Est enim alabastrum genus marmoris lucidissimum*) – Benvenuto de Rambaldis de Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldighierij Comoediam*, T. 5, 1887, s. 131–132.

79 Eucherius of Lyon (d. ca. 450) has described alabaster as “genus marmoris preciosi”, see Eucherius Lugdunensis, *Instructiones ad Slonium*, II. 3, *Patrologia Latina*, T. 50, col. 816. Later, Petrus Comestor (d. 1178) referring to alabaster evoked this opinion describing alabaster as “genus marmoris candidi et perlucidi, variis coloribus intertincti” – Petrus Comestor, *Historia scholastica*, 20, Cap. 116. (*De alabastrum unguenti*), *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 198, col. 1597. Albertus Magnus has expressed similar opinion on alabaster, see Note 65. Even in Giovanni Andrea Scartazzini's *Enciclopedia Dantesca* alabaster is “pietra calcarea della natura del marmot, ma alquanto trasparente e piütenera” or “alabastro, èspezie di marmot bianchissimo e purissimo” – see: G. A. Scartazzini, *Enciclopedia Dantesca: Dizionario critico e Ragionato di quanto concerne la vita e la opera di Dante Alighieri*, Vol. 1, Milano 1896, Vol. I, p. 50. Gerhardt Schmidt has stated that the term “alabaster” was used in the High Middle Ages as a synonym for both white marble and real alabaster (*gypsum carbonate*) – see: G. Schmidt, *Beiträge zu Stil und Ouvre des Jean de Liège*, [in:] *Gotische Bildwerke und ihre Meister*, Textband, Wien, Köln, Weimar 1992, p. 78, Note. 2.

80 See: M. Bradley, *Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome*, p. 5, note 15; M. Greenhalgh, *Marble Past...*, p. 27; V. Ivanovici, *Divine Light Through Earthly Colours*, p. 82.

81 *Critical Edition of Robert Grosseteste's "De colore"*, [in:] *The Dimensions of Colour, Robert Grosseteste's "De Colore"*, edit., transl., and interdisciplinary analysis by G. Dinkova-Bruun, G. E. M. Gasper, M. Huxtable, T. C. B. McLeish, C. Pantì, and H. Smithson, Durham-Toronto 2013, pp. 16–17. Much earlier Origen, quoted by Liz James, noted that “since there are even degrees among white things, his garments [Christ's clothes in the Transfiguration scene] became as white as the brightest and purest of all white things, that is light” – L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, p. 120.

of sunlight” (Par. II, 31–32)⁸². The Neoplatonic Classical understanding of such terms as light and its dazzling whiteness and brightness, luminosity, reflection, radiance, splendour and translucency of shining bodies, created (*sub lucis similitudine*) a bridge of metaphysical dimensions between the earthly and celestial realms, both in pagan and Christian philosophies⁸³. Light therefore is “both symbolic and physical manifestation of divinity”⁸⁴. The medieval scholars used this metaphor as leading factor in their theological and philosophical speculations, because “the most divine and noble or beautiful aspect of things is their light, a light which all things have in varying degrees, thus constituting a hierarchy of luminous leading to God”⁸⁵. This “strongly Neoplatonic doctrine of light penetrated the whole intellectual atmosphere of thirteenth-century Europe”⁸⁶. For Robert Grosseteste also “light, as the principle of colour, is the beauty and ornament of all that is visible”⁸⁷. This idea blended with Aristotelian doctrine of light and beauty allowed to conceive a consistent system, which, by the use of many shiny, translucent and reflective materials in various visual arts (painting, sculpture, precious stones and metals), created a concept of a sensual and transcendental (spiritual) discourse, known already in the Classical antiquity and the Byzantine spirituality⁸⁸. As a result, in the thirteenth century, not only in Italy, but also in the Parisian and Franco-Flemish art and later in Spain and England, created a basis for emerging an interest in executing sculpture in the polished glossy white, reflective and translucent materials, including ivory, white marble and alabaster⁸⁹. Dante was well aware of the existence of the religious and symbolic importance of such materials transmitting light and

82 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradiso*, pp. 19, 24; S. A. Gilson, *Light Reflexion, Mirror Metaphors...*, p. 243. Fabio Barry has noted that “when marble, which was a more opaque cousin of crystal, was polished it recovered this original light [the active principle of the Logos] in a surface slick” – F. Barry, *Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, “The Art Bulletin”, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Dec. 2007), p. 635.

83 D. Chidester, *Word against Light: Perception and the Conflict of Symbols*, “The Journal of Religion”, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Jan. 1985), pp. 55–62; L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, pp. 70, 119–20.

84 C. N. Duckworth and A. E. Sassin, *On Colour and Light*, [in:] *Colour and Light in Ancient and Medieval Art*, ed. by C. N. Duckworth and A. E. Sassin, New York and London 2018, p. 2.

85 J. A. Mazzeo, *Light Metaphysics: Dante’s “Convivio” and the letter to Can Grande Della Scala*, p. 201.

86 J. A. Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in “Dante’s Comedy”*, p. 61.

87 S.-G. Heller, *Light as Glamour: The Luminescent Ideal of Beauty in the Roman de la Rose*, „Speculum”, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Oct. 2001), p. 934.

88 See articles in *Colour and Light in Ancient and Medieval Art*, ed. by C. N. Duckworth and A. E. Sassin, New York and London 2018; J. I. Miller, *Symbolic Light in Giotto and the Early Quattrocento in Florence*, “Notes in the History of Art” 5 (1985) No. 1 (*Essays in Honor of Howard McP. Davis*), pp. 7–13. For use of various translucent and shiny materials in the Byzantine art, see G. Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*, University Park (PA) 2004 and James 1996, p. 59 (Aristotle).

89 For ivory in the Thirteenth-Century Parisian art – see: S. M. Guérin, *Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine*, “The Art Bulletin” 2013, vol. 95, No. 1 (March), pp. 53–77. For white marble

reflecting it off the objects as the divine splendour or God's grace and beauty (*splendour or candor*)⁹⁰. These two verbs and movements, "penetrate" and "reflect" (*penetra e risplende*), define the "true" dual nature of light and reveal the fundamental dynamic structure of the whole universe⁹¹. To express and describe this sacred vision in the *Divine Comedy*, instead writing in Latin, Dante used the vernacular Italian and secular vocabulary as the rhetorical tools in the "pictorial" descriptions of materials and works of art, defined as "visible speech" (Purg. X, 95)⁹².

Abstrakt

Od czasów starożytnych zwierciadło łączone było ze słońcem — symbolem boskości, pierwotnym źródłem światła, zarówno fizycznego (*lumen*), jak i metafizycznego (*lux*). Według antycznej i średniowiecznej neoplatonickiej, a szczególnie pseudo-dionizyjskiej tradycji filozoficznej światło naturalne oraz, jako retoryczna metafora, światło nadprzyrodzone (metafizyczne) promieniają i przeświecają cały wszechświat. Światło odbija się jak w zwierciadle (*speculum*) w ciałach kosmicznych i ziemskich jako boski blask (*candor* lub *splendor*). Idea ta, jako misterium chrześcijańskie, wyrażona została w średniowieczu najpełniej na kartach *Boskiej komedii* Dantego Alighieri. Temu epickiemu poematowi, w opinii samego poety „świętemu” (Raj, XXV, 1) — bodaj najślawniejszemu i najbardziej inspirującemu współcześnie tekstowi średniowiecznemu — został poświęcony list apostolski *Candor lucis aeternae* (Błask światłości wiekuistej) papieża Franciszka z okazji siedemsetnej rocznicy śmierci Dantego. Nie jest przy tym przypadkiem, że opublikowano go w święto Zwiastowania Najświętszej Maryi Panny i Wcielenia Chrystusa (25 marca 2021). Sam Chrystus bowiem jest „światłością świata” i „światłem życia” (J. 8, 12), źródłem jego emanacji i wizją transcendentalnego wcielenego Boga⁹³.

W augustiańskiej typologicznej i metaforycznej tradycji egzegetycznej, opierającej się zarówno na źródłach pogańskich, jak i chrześcijańskich, pojawiło się rozróżnienie na zwierciadła duszy i umysłu. Pierwsze odnosiło się do zwierciadła „w którym zgromadzone są najbardziej odpowiednio wyobrażone idee archetypiczne jako kompendium wiedzy lub wyidealizowanych cnót”. „W zwierciadle umysłu natomiast odbija się świat widzialny (sensualny), dając podstawę

and alabaster — see: K. Woods, *Cut in Alabaster: a Material of Sculpture and its European Traditions 1330–1530*, London–Turnhout 2018.

90 S.-G. *Light as Glamour...*, p. 938, Note 22. Sarah-Grace Heller in her article analysed the impact of the medieval theory of light and luminescence on the contemporary secular courtly fashion — see: S.-G. *Light as Glamour...*, pp. 934–959.

91 “The glory of the One Who moves all things penetrates all the universe, reflecting in one part more and in another less” (Par. I, 1–3) — D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. III: *Paradiso*, pp. XIV, 1, 5–6.

92 D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. II: *Purgatory*, pp. 111 and 116; Fiero 1975, p. 1.

93 Cytaty biblijne z: *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*, Poznań 2000.

do tworzenia luster, które ostrzegają przed światem przemijalnym [...] np. w wyniku egzegezy Pisma Świętego”. Tradycja ta stworzyła podstawę dla chrystologicznej interpretacji mądrości Bożej (*sapientia*) ściśle według kategorii neoplatońskich jako blask nadprzyrodzonej światłości wiekuistej, „jest bowiem odbłaskiem światłości wiekuistej, zwierciadłem bez skazy działania Boga, obrazem jego dobroci” (Mdr 7, 26). Z tej interpretacji wywodzi się również „zwierciadło” (*speculum*) jako tytuł-metafora niezwykle popularnego w średniowieczu rodzaju literackiego zawierającego kompendium wiedzy z zakresu filozofii lub teologii — traktaty moralne i dydaktyczne, ale również żywoty świętych. Do tego rodzaju „zwierciadła” zdaje się nawiązywać Mark Musa, tłumacz *Boskiej komedii* na język angielski, pisząc, że „poemat ten [...] odzwierciadla niemal kompletny obraz średniowiecznej Europy”. Dante istotnie używa figurę „zwierciadła” w różnych metaforycznych kontekstach, szczególnie w Czyścicu i Raju.

U źródeł tej bogatej w symboliczne znaczenia tradycji znajdowały się słowa św. Augustyna, który stwierdził, że „wszystko co zostało napisane w Piśmie św. jest dla nas zwierciadłem” (*Omnia enim que hic conscripta sunt, speculum nostra sunt*). W średniowieczu Hugo od św. Wiktora przetworzył tę myśl, uznając, że „zwierciadło ma dwie funkcje: pokazać nam kim jesteśmy i kim powinniśmy być”. Dokładnie w takim antropologicznym kontekście Dante Alighieri użył *speculum* (*specchio*) w wersach Pieśni IX (94–102) z Czyścica, w których opisał sposób, w jaki św. Łucja przyprowadza go i towarzyszącego mu Wergiliusza do trzech stopni wiodących do bramy Czyścica⁹⁴. Stopnie te symbolizują trzy z czterech stopni sakramentu pokuty (spowiedź, skrucha i zadośćuczynienie). Najniższy stopień odpowiadający spowiedzi został wykonany z polerowanego na lustro białego marmuru, które w interpretacji średniowiecznej jest „czystym zwierciadłem sumienia” (*videbat se clare in speculo conscientiae*).

Blask (*splendor, candor*) tworzą promienie światła odbijające się w różnorodnych polerowanych i w konsekwencji błyszczących materiałach i ciałach, takich jak biały marmur czy alabaster, ale też woda, szkło, kość słoniowa, cenne kamienie i metale. W tej samej Pieśni IX Dante opisuje swoją reakcję na blask bijący z postaci anioła-strażnika i jego nagiego miecza stojącego u bramy do Czyścica: „Taka się jasna paliła poświata, żem nie mógł okiem zdzierżyć go na razie” (Czyściec, Pieśń IX, 81–84). Podobnie w Pieśni XV Poeta został zmuszony do przysłonięcia dłonią oczu bowiem „od nadmiaru jaskrawości broni jako od wody albo od zwierciadła odbita strzała jasnego promienia w stronę przeciwną odpryska” (Czyściec, Pieśń XV, 15–18). W tych wersach promienie światła nie tylko penetrują wodę lub szkło, ale także odbijają się zgodnie z prawami optyki.

Już w klasycznej starożytności i w ciągu wieków średnich światło jako właściwość słońca, które samo jest symbolem stranscendentalnego Boga, stało się metaforą metafizycznego światła niematerialnego. W tradycji chrześcijańskiej idea ta wywodzi się z Biblii, w której Chrystus nazwał się sam „światłością świata” (J 8, 12). Do tych słów Jezusa odnosi się Dante w wersach, w których opisuje Zbawiciela jako „Słońce” („tak zobaczyłem nad iskier milionem [dusz — ZB]

94 Cytaty polskie pochodzą z: D. Alighieri, *Boska komedia*, przekł. E. Porębowicz, Kraków 2007.

Słońce; tamtejsze światy tak nim płoną jak gwiazdy w stropie wyiskrzonym. Pod przezroczystą i jasną przepołą lśniła substancja światłości tak wielka, że nie mógł oczu obrócić tą stroną” (Czyściec, Pieśń XXIII, 28–33).

W klasycznej Grecji skrzęca się świetlistość najbardziej porządanego białego marmuru z Paros opisywano tymi samymi określeniami stosowanymi w przypadku szlachetnych kamieni emitujących światło. Demokryt używał słowa „jasny” i „błyszczący” jako synonimów białego. Pliniusz Starszy wspominał, że wierni oglądający figurę Hekate w Efezie wykonaną z białego marmuru byli ostrzegani, by przyglądać się jej z ostrożnością; tak intensywny był blask (polerowanego) marmuru. Wergiliusz, przewodnik Dantego w Piekło i Czyśćcu, sam neoplatonik, w opisie wspaniałego wyglądu Eneasza przed królową Dydoną porównał go do marmuru paryjskiego (*Pariisque lapis*).

Wypolerowany marmur z powodu swej bieli (*candor*), zdolności błyszczenia (*luminosity*) i przejrzystości (*translucency, perspicuitas*) stał się jednym z najbardziej prestiżowych materiałów używanych w antyku klasycznym, wymienianych razem z kością słoniową i brązem. Wśród innych rodzajów białych marmurów bardzo popularny był wysokiej jakości marmur z Luni (*marmor lunense*), znany później jako marmur kararyjski, który we wczesnym okresie cesarstwa nadał Rzymowi „fizyczny i ideologiczny wygląd” „miasta z marmuru” (*urbs marmorea*). Decydująca dla jego popularności była lśniąca biel (*candor* lub *candidus color*) i przezroczystość (*perspicuitas*). Jak zauważył John Pollini, „ten blask jest związany również jasną i błyszczącą naturą „złotego wieku” (*saeculum aureum*) rzymskiej cywilizacji. Ta neoplatońska w swej istocie, imperialna i kulturalna retoryka wyrażała się w szczególnie sztuce i architekturze jako środkach wizualnej komunikacji. Retoryka materiału, w tym wypadku białego i lśniącego marmuru, odgrywała niezwykle ważną symboliczną rolę w deifikacji samego cesarza na podobieństwo Słońca, źródła światła i jego promieniującej aury świętości (*augustness*).

Mimo różnic religijnych ideologiczna spuścizna antyku klasycznego z jego neoplatonicznym symbolicznym anturazem, włączając użycie lśniących i przezroczystych materiałów, była również obecna w antyku wczesnochrześcijańskim, Bizancjum i w wiekach średnich. Przejawiała się między innymi w dekorowaniu ścian świątyń chrześcijańskich polerowanymi płytami białego marmuru i alabastru. Proces ten stał się od około 1000 roku na tyle intensywny, że zwłaszcza we Włoszech i Galii kościoły jawiły się jako „odziane” w biel. Ich wzorowane na klasycyzmie rzymskim formy architektoniczne znane były w Toskanii. Epitafium Busketo, pierwszego architekta (*operarius*) katedry w Pizie z przełomu XI i XII wieku, zawiera jego eulogię jako budowniczego, ale także jego dzieła wykonanego z białego jak śnieg marmuru.

Z pewnością płyty białego marmuru pokrywające ściany pizańskiego Duomo i innych świątyń w Toskanii były wygładzane, by uzyskać lśniąca powierzchnię i przejrzystość w wrażeniem głębi. Taką klasyczną, śnieżnobiałą polerowaną powierzchnię otrzymały reliefy wykonane w XIII wieku przez Nicolę Pisanięgo (1220–1284) i jego syna Giovaniego (ok. 1248–1318), którzy służyli ze stylu nawiązującego do wczesnoimperialnej rzymskiej, jak i gotyckiej plastyki

francuskiej, także inspirowanej tą samą rzymską tradycją rzeźbiarską. Co istotne, w swoich pracach wykorzystywali oni nie tylko biały marmur ze złóż lokalnych, ale i otwartych po wiekach zapomnienia kamieniołomów w Kararze. Erwin Panofsky nazwał Nicole Pisaniego największym — i w pewnych sensie ostatnim — ze średniowiecznych klasycystów. Podobnie Dante był ostatnim scholastykiem i poetą średniowiecza. Z pewnością znał on prace rodziny Pisanich i Arnolfo di Cambio — inspirowane antycznymi formami klasycznymi. Mógł je zobaczyć w rodzimej Florencji, potem w Pizie, Luce, Pisto, Padwie i Rzymie.

Dante odnosi się wprost do klasycznej greckiej i rzymskiej tradycji rzeźbiarskiej, gdy wspomina Polikleta w opisie trzech reliefów przedstawiających sceny wykonane w białym marmurze. Pierwszy z nich ukazuje zwiastowanie Marii (Czyściec, Pieśń X, 34–45), drugi króla Dawida tańczącego przed Arką Przymierza (Czyściec, Pieśń X, 55–69), trzeci — cesarza Trajana wysłuchującego skargi biednej wdowy (Czyściec, Pieśń X, 73–93). W lapidarnych opisach, na podobieństwo klasycznej ekfrazy, Dante umiejętnie łączy starożytną tradycję retoryczną z retoryką plastyki klasycznej, akcentując również lśniąca biel marmuru (Czyściec, Pieśń X, 28–45 i 55, 72).

Poeta wie, że płaskorzeźby te zostały wykonane przez Boga, największego Mistrza-artystę: „On, dla którego żadna rzecz nie nowa, rzeźbił te oczom mym wymowne twory, a dziwne, bo ich kunszt ziemski nie kowa” (Czyściec, Pieśń X, 94–96). Natura i człowiek są w stanie naśladować jedynie artystyczną aktywność Boga, ponieważ „reliefy reprezentują poziom artystyczny nieznanym widzowi”. Zatem nawet tak sławny rzeźbiarz jak Poliklet z Argos nie był w stanie osiągać poziomu artystycznego Stwórcy.

Dante Alighieri odnosi się w *Boskiej komedii* do alabastru jako materiału tylko raz, kiedy opisuje spotkanie z duszą swego przodka i krzyżowca — Cacciaguidy (Raj, Pieśń XV, 19–24). Elsa Filosa w swym artykule stwierdziła, że źródłem terminu „alabaster” w tych wersach był traktat *De mineralibus* (*O mineralach*) Alberta Wielkiego. Jednakże niedawno Francesca Galli zwróciła uwagę na wersy „z bieli jarzącej swój ognek wyłoni i jak za płytą alabastru pała” (Raj, Pieśń XV, 23–2). Metafora ta pojawiła się w traktacie filozoficznym *De luce* Bartolomeusa z Bolonii prezentującym jego filozofię światła. Ten franciszkański filozof i kaznodzieja przedstawił w praktyczny duszpasterski sposób koncepcję światła fizycznego jako analogię i metaforę światła metafizycznego (sub lucis similitudo). Ta „spiritualizacja” światła widzialnego pozwoliła mu „odczytywać” pełne blasku (splendoru) materiały i przedmioty, takie jak świece, alabastrowe płytki, drogie kamienie, zwierciadła, witraże, ukazane w różnych metaforycznych kontekstach, by stworzyć mentalny obraz Bożej, nadprzyrodzonej rzeczywistości. By móc kontemplować rzeczy nadprzyrodzone, należy rozpocząć ten proces od tego, co jest widoczne w świecie materialnym. Dlatego dusza przodka Dantego „jarzyła” się nie tylko jak „ognik” „za płytą alabastru”, ale była również zwierciadłem.

Termin „alabaster” od starożytności poprzez średniowiecze używany był zarówno do określenia białego marmuru, jak i do alabastru (*gypsum carbonate*). Wspólne dla obu materiałów były nie tyle jaskrawa biel, ale przede wszystkim możliwość ich polerowania i przez-

roczystość. Robert Grosseteste wyraził powszechną w średniowieczu opinię, że „jasne i obfite światło w czystym przezroczystym medium jest białe” (*lux igitur clara multa in perspicuo puro albo est*). Dla Dantego oba materiały są jak „obłok mleczny: tuman błyszczącej, gęstej, zbitej bieli, skrzęcej jak klejnot w poświacie słonecznej” (*Raj, Pieśń II, 31–33*). Neoplatońskie klasyczne i chrześcijańskie rozumienie takich określeń jak: biel, świetlistość, zdolność odbijania promieni światła, blask i przezroczystość lśniących ciał stworzyło metafizyczny łącznik pomiędzy ziemią i niebem. Światło jest zatem „jednocześnie symboliczną i fizyczną manifestacją boskości”. Następne pokolenia komentatorów średniowiecznych używały tej klasycznej metafory w swoich filozoficznych i teologicznych rozważaniach, ponieważ „najbardziej boskim i szlachetnym lub pięknym aspektem wyglądu przedmiotów jest ich światło, które posiadają w różnym stopniu, tworząc hierarchię blasku (świetlistości) prowadzącego do Boga”. Cała intelektualna atmosfera trzynastowiecznej Europy była przesiąknięta tą neoplatońską doktryną światła. Dla Roberta Grosseteste światło, jako podstawa koloru, jest pięknem i dekoracją wszystkiego, co jest widzialne”. Idea ta łączona w XIII wieku z arystotelesowską filozofią światła i piękna pozwalała sformułować spójny system, w którym — poprzez użycie w sztuce różnych lśniących, przezroczystych i odbijających światło materiałów — można było prowadzić wizualny i transcendentalny dyskurs, znany już w starożytności klasycznej i w bizantyjskiej teologii i sztuce. W rezultacie nie tylko we Włoszech, ale i w sztuce paryskiej i franko-flamandzkiej, później także w Anglii i Hiszpanii pojawiło się w plastyce zainteresowanie stosowaniem kości słoniowej, białego marmuru i alabastru. Dante miał świadomość symbolicznego znaczenia materiałów przenoszących światło lub odbijających jego blask (*splendor* lub *candor*) fizyczny i (*sub lucis similitudine*) bożej światłości wiekuiestej. Dwa czasowniki „przechodzić” i „odbijać” (*penetra* i *risplende*) definiują „prawdziwą” dualistyczną naturę światła i ukazują fundamentalną dynamiczną strukturę całego wszechświata. Co istotne, by wyrazić i opisać tę sakralną wizję w *Boskiej komedii*, Dante użył — jako narzędzi retorycznych w obrazowym opisie materiałów i dzieł sztuki — wyrażen z potocznego języka i słownictwa włoskiego, a nie łaciny.

Słowa kluczowe: światło, zwierciadło, biały marmur, alabaster, splendor, blask, Dante, *Boska komedia*

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