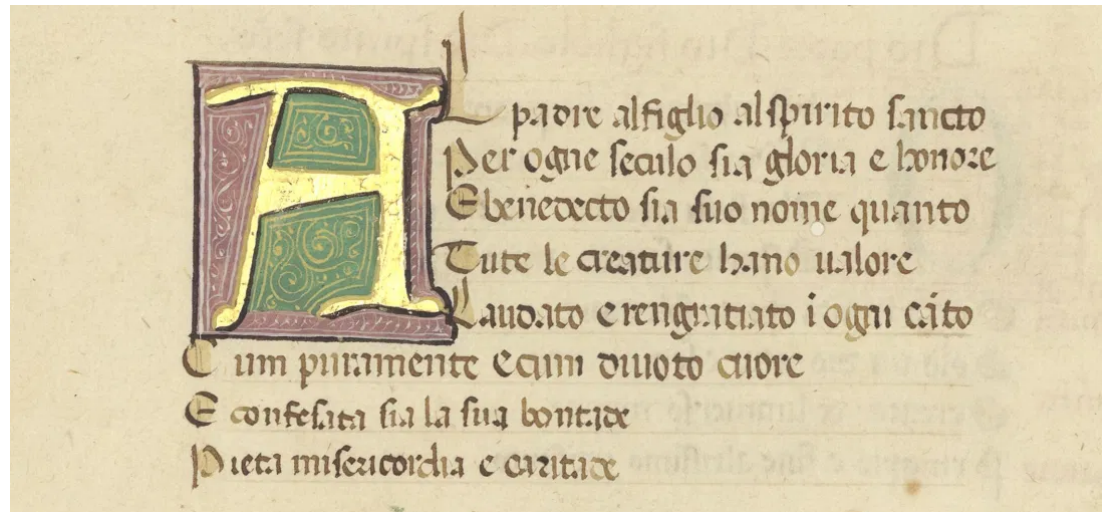


La Sfera Challenge

Équipe France

Équipe France will use the version from the

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arsenal MS 8536, **ff. 55r-78v**



MS 8536, **ff. 55r**

TEAM DOCUMENTS

Transcription Portal

Project Log

Rules and Guidelines

Team Updates:

May 29: In our meeting earlier this week we discussed a large problem: how should we describe the images in our manuscript? As Équipe France’s manuscript is empirically the most beautiful of the three, we don’t want to sell short its visual appeal, but we are (most of us) not trained art historians. There’s also the fact that we expect our transcriptions to be viewed side-by-side with the manuscript images, meaning detailed descriptions might not be necessary. Anne and Stephanie volunteered to take charge of describing our images, using standardized terminology and providing just enough detail to visualize the color, subject and layout. Among the terms they agreed on: the color of the water in the map images is aquamarine (except for the Red Sea, which is of course red); the cities are reddish-brown; the dragons in the “Torre di Mabel” are more specifically wyverns.

-Emma Stanford

May 26: One of the issues that kept coming up in the process of transcribing our manuscript was the question of non-standard letterforms and orthography. The most common of these was the c-caudata, or **ç** letterform. This is often understood as a written variant of **z**, although its form in our scribe’s Italian Gothic bookhand looks less like a

traditional **z** (bookhand or cursive) and more like a **c** with a tail, or even a **c** with a cursive **z** attached below it. This is pretty common in late medieval Italian manuscripts written in the vernacular, but it tends to surprise non-Italianists.

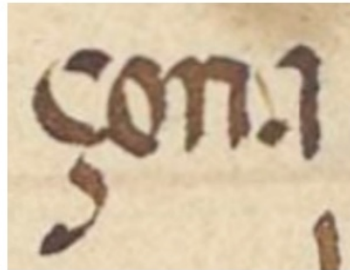
example
bookhand z

z

example
cursive z

z

our MS:
çona (*zona*)



The Challenge’s transcription guidelines advised us to “use modern letter forms (ie., long s to short s, u to v when applicable, I to J when applicable, ç to z when applicable etc.)” So initially we considered transcribing all occurrences of **ç** as **z**, but we gradually realized that our scribe uses **ç** not only in cases where a modern Italian would put a **z** (*sença* >> *senza*) or **zz** (*grandeça* >> *grandezza*), but also in place of modern Italian **c** (*dolçe* >> *dolce*) or **cc(i)** (*giaça* >> *ghiaccio*), and **g** (*inçegno* >> *ingegno*) or **gg** (*oçi* >> *oggi*). He also regularly uses Latinate spellings in cases where a reader of the vernacular might expect Italianate endings (*sapientia* >> *sapienza*).

We checked to see how the other teams were handling this problem, but that wasn't much help: while all of these are 15th-century manuscripts, they're each written in different scripts, all of them widely used in fifteenth-century Italy: Squadra Italia's Vatican MS (BAV Urb. Lat. 752) is written in a humanist hand that distinguishes **ç** from **z**, and they quite rightly maintained that difference in their transcription. Meanwhile Team USA's Yale MS (Beinecke 328) is written in a more cursive mercantesca script that more closely approximates modern Italian spelling (so in stanzas 5–6 of *La sfera*, where our scribe writes *essentia / volçe / potentia / sapientia / grandea*, their scribe writes *essenza / volgi / potenza / sapienza / grandezza*).

In the end we decided that indiscriminately transcribing all **ç**'s in our MS to **z**'s would probably make the text less readable, not more so, and that maintaining the **ç**'s would not only be more transparent in scholarly terms but could demonstrate something about how a particular 15th-century scribe and

speaker of the Italian vernacular understood—and tried to record—elision or overlap between sounds we now think of as distinct, not just -c- and -z-, but their relatives -ch-, -dg-, -ts-, and -zh- (pardon the informal transliteration; I am not a linguist).

– *Carrie Beneš*

May 24: #ÉquipeFrance’s transcription and revision continue apace, much aided by our Italian speakers—as well as our very active Slack channel!

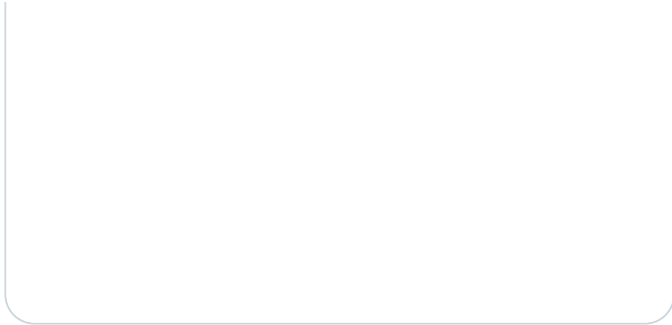
Meanwhile, those following the #LaSferaChallenge on Twitter have drawn attention to other manuscript witnesses, including copies held by the Newberry Library:




Lisa Fagin Davis @lisafdavis · May 23, 2020 


Let's not get so caught up in transcribing that we fail to appreciate the amazing illustrations of Dati's La Sfera! Here's a diagram of Earth shadowing the moon when the sun is in opposition. Geocentric, but points for effort. ([@BeineckeLibrary](#) MS 328, f. 5r) [#laspherachallenge](#)



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet. The tweet text is as above. Below the text is a large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, which is the area where the diagram mentioned in the text would have been displayed. The entire tweet is enclosed in a light blue border.





 **Karen Christianson**
@KACNewberry

The [@NewberryLibrary](#) has the most gorgeous illustrated manuscript version of Sfera, from c. 1425! Fully digitized here digcoll.newberry.org/#/item/nby_dig...
[@DigitalNewberry](#) [#medievaltwitter](#)
[#medievalmanuscripts](#) [#medieval](#) [#maps](#)

3:49 PM · May 23, 2020 

 9  See Karen Christianson's other Tweets

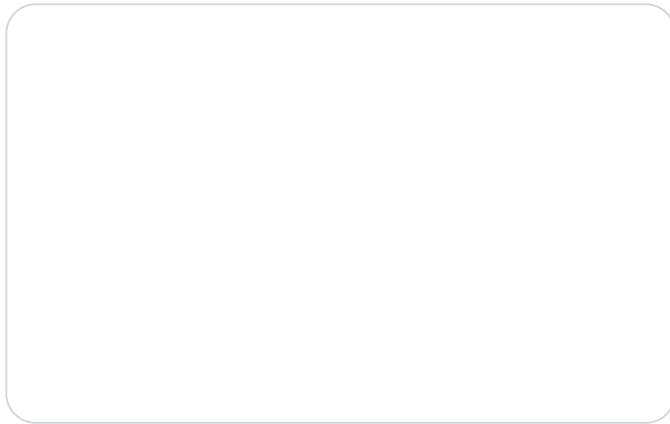
as well as the Houghton Library and Boston Public Library:

 **Lisa Fagin Davis** @lisafdavis · May 23, 2020 

Replying to @lisafdavis

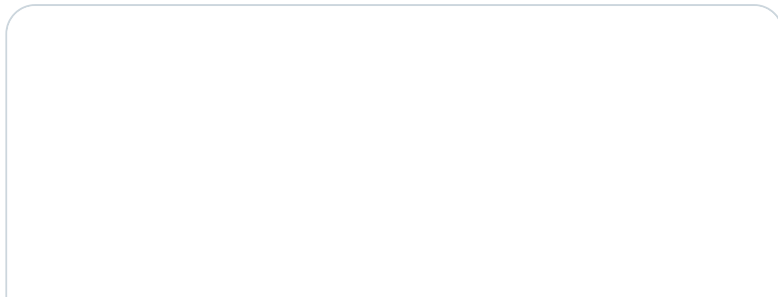
Here's another, w/ the 3 subject mss. We're observing different orthographic traditions + textual variants. Will be interesting to see if the

illustrative grouping (Vat. and [@BeineckeLibrary](#) vs. BnF) is manifested in the text as well. Need to compare more mss!!! [#lasferachallenge](#)



Lisa Fagin Davis
[@lisafdavis](#)

Because I couldn't resist, I collated one stanza (shown here, starting with "Frison") of the three [#lasferachallenge](#) mss against mss [@HoughtonLib](#) [@BPLBoston](#) and a second [@BeineckeLibrary](#). BnF was a textual outlier, giving "intra molto" on line 5 where others give "e va molto".



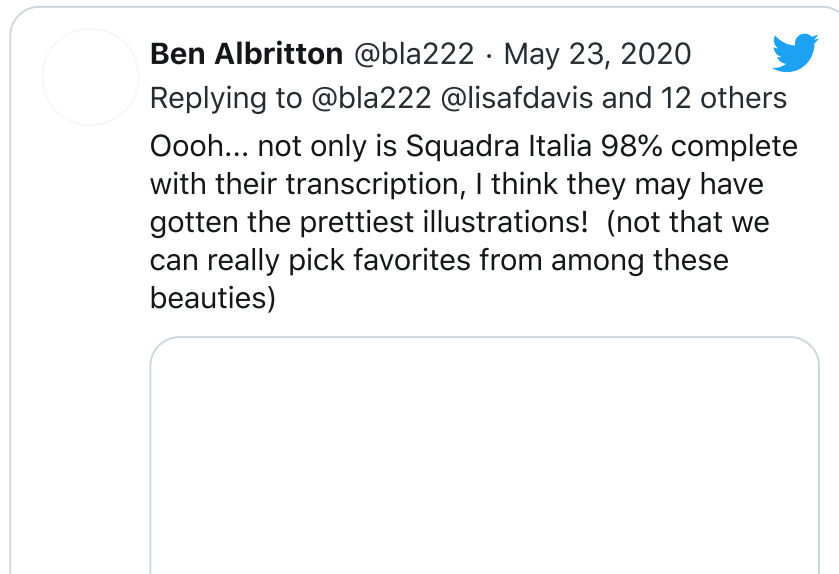


After #TeamUSA editor Ben Albritton put his considerable skills to work to enable side-by-side comparison of the various manuscripts, we learned that the illustrations in #ÉquipeFrance's text diverge from those found in other witnesses:





Nonetheless, we prefer our copy—after all, out of the three versions of La Sfera involved in the challenge, #ÉquipeFrance's is the only one to offer bonus dragons:





– *Stephanie Lahey*

May 23: The team met yesterday to kick things off. Despite having only one actual French person on board, our *esprit d'équipe* is strong. We have a Slack channel for paleography questions and a Twitter group for complaining about our

- Régis Robineau, Biblissima, Team Lead
 - Emma Stanford, formerly of the Bodleian Libraries, Co-Lead
 - Anne McLaughlin, Co-Lead, The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College
 - Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn, Durham University
 - Charlie Barranu, Cambridge University
 - Laura Cleaver, University of London
 - Carrie Beneš, New College of Florida
 - Seb Falk, Cambridge University
 - Stephanie Lahey, University of Victoria
 - Sarah Gilbert, Durham University
 - Debora Dameri, Archivio Storico del Comune di Modena
-

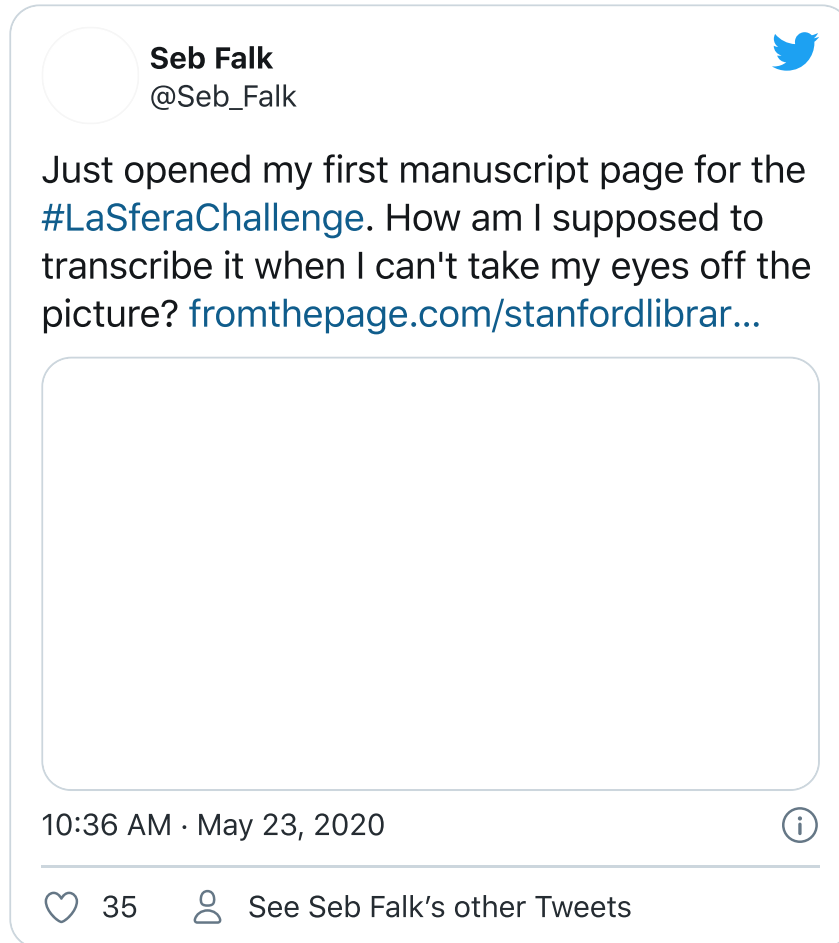
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Edit

[La Sfera Challenge, Create a free website or blog at WordPress.com.](https://lasferachallenge.wordpress.com/home/equipe-france/)

scribe's letterforms and idiosyncratic spelling. While we may be slightly biased, there is no question in our minds that our manuscript is the most visually appealing:



– *Emma Stanford*