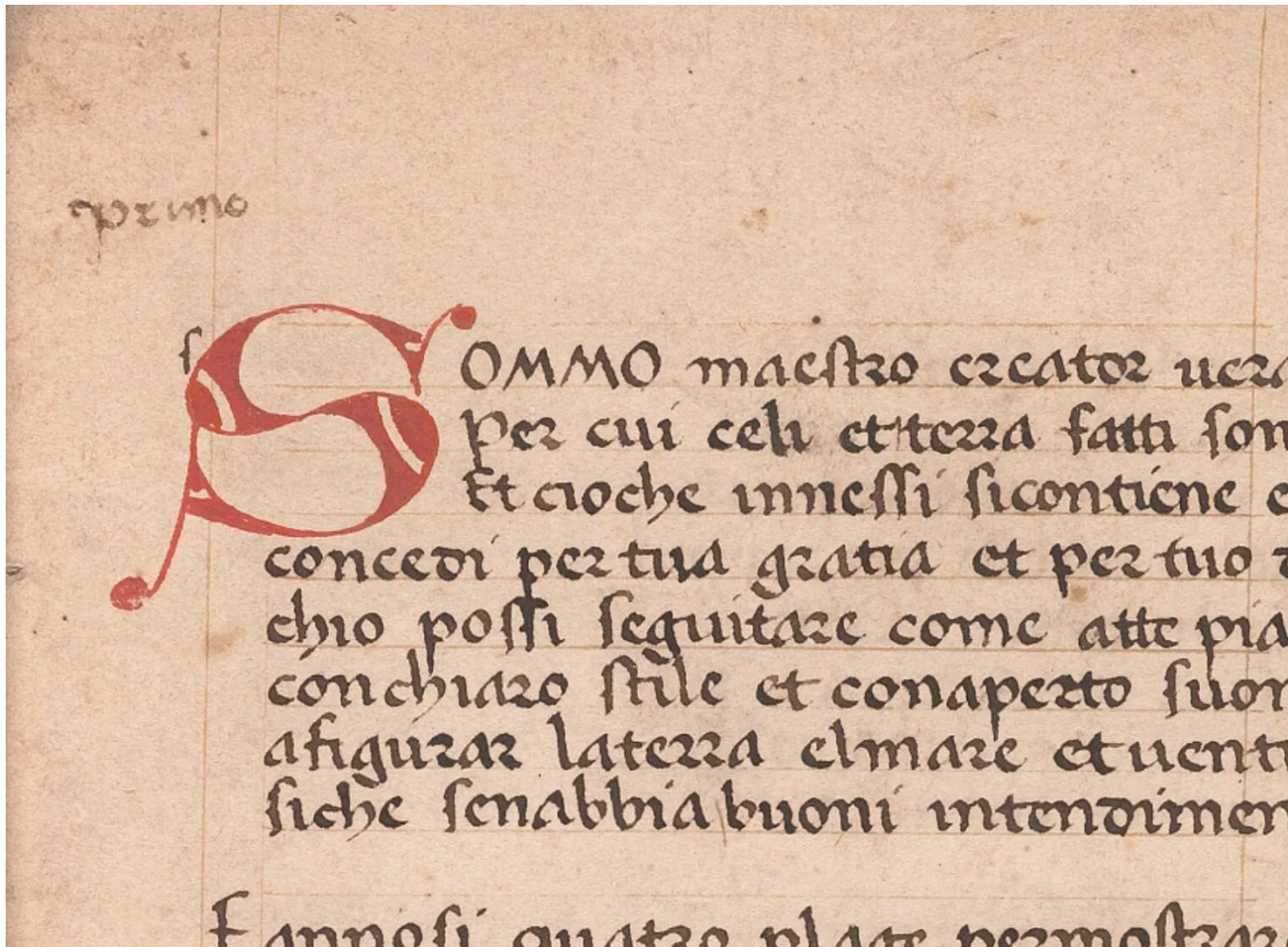


La Sfera Challenge

# Team Yale



Team Yale will work with a version housed at the [Yale, Beinecke 946](#).

## TEAM YALE DOCUMENTS

[Transcription Portal](#)

[Project Log](#)

[Rules and Guidelines](#)

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## TEAM UPDATES:

**July 31:** Seeing as today is the last day of #LaSferaChallenge2, we have some blog updates for you!

**First, and shared on social media earlier this week, here's Anna-Amicia Litwinska's post on her experience as part of Team Yale:**

I didn't immediately want to join the La Sfera Challenge: sure enough, it all sounded exciting, but there were two obstacles (or so I thought). First, I didn't have the necessary qualifications: I graduated from university with a major in English, more than a decade ago, and even when working on my graduate thesis on Shakespeare's histories, I didn't work with manuscripts (going to British or European archives from Moscow just wasn't feasible with my means then). Second, Italian manuscripts are outside my sphere as an independent researcher: I'm mostly into the 13-th century Capetian aristocracy and the French Montfort family. Eventually, curiosity won, and I DM'd Laura on Twitter and asked if I could join, warning that I was no specialist and never worked on manuscripts, and could only bring from my side some knowledge of Latin, some conversational Italian, and curiosity.

To be honest, I didn't expect Laura to reply that they would love to have me and offer to choose between the two teams still having vacant places – Yale and Newberry. I chose Team Yale, just because I've taken Yale courses from Coursera and liked them. Turned out I chose well!

I was a bit apprehensive of the challenge, and seriously questioned why I should have enrolled, but then I discovered that I had a personal connection to Goro Dati: his brother, who is sometimes thought to be his co-author, was Master General of the Dominican Order, and I'm a member of its lay branch! And La Sfera itself describes some of the lands I need to have a knowledge of as my studies sometimes involve the Crusades.

The very first email from our co-captains Anne and Caterina and the introductory Zoom meeting put me more at ease: I knew I was going to work with amazing and kind people. Working on the manuscript itself proved to be much easier and much more fun than I anticipated! Goro Dati lived in Florence some time after Dante, so his Italian is easy to follow, even for someone with a limited knowledge of the language, the scribe who did our Beinecke MS 946 had a neat and clean handwriting, and the stanzas themselves are very beautiful and a delight to read! Working with my amazing teammates made the experience even better: I greatly enjoyed our discussions over Zoom and Slack, and it was a wonderful opportunity to learn!

Probably the most important thing I've learnt is this: if you're curious about a project, but not sure if you qualify to participate, it never hurts to ask! The La Sfera Challenge community is an amazing fellowship of friendly, supportive, and open-minded people, and if you don't have the exact qualifications for working on a manuscript, it doesn't mean you can't learn on the go and contribute – and your other skills and knowledge may prove to be very useful for the team, too!

### **Second, reminiscing yesterday evening, I (Anne McLaughlin) thought it high time that we get around to some 'introductions' for the team:**

This blog post ought to be a rather mundane accounting of how Team Yale has spent their time working in the Yale, Beinecke MS 946 during the two weeks of the second part of the La Sfera Challenge. While we will get to that, I figure that it's only right that I first introduce our team and the people who have worked so hard to get our manuscript not only transcribed, but our Italian checked, the places, people, winds, and constellations indexed, and contributed tweets, blog posts, and their multifaceted expertise to our vociferous Slack channel.

I've had the great privilege to co-captain two teams as part of the greater La Sfera Challenge, the first, the victorious Équipe France with Régis Robineau and Emma Stanford, and now Team Yale with the indomitable Caterina Agostini. In approaching the second instalment of the Challenge, I assumed it would be much the same as the first – instead, while some of our working methods and ethos were carried forward, the formation of the team was an entirely new process. The first team I co-captained consisted predominantly of people either known to me or my other two co-captains, on the other hand Team Yale was made up of new faces and new names, people that I've had the extraordinary privilege of working with and coming to know over the last two weeks. Though I can't claim to know any of them well, I beg your indulgence in allowing me to introduce you to them as I have come to know them via Zoom meeting and Slack channel introductions.

**Caterina Agostini** has been a stalwart co-captain, going so far as to join our first Zoom meeting at her neighbour's house as her internet was playing up. Via email, slack, or twitter messages, she's been a welcome companion as we've led an entirely new team to victory.

**Lara Harwood-Ventura** has a knack for asking the slack questions (what do we do when the scribe's spaces don't match the word breaks?) we all really need answers to before we had even thought to consider them. And she jumped in today, helping to index many of the geographical locations found in the text.

**Aaron Macks** is a computer wiz turned indexing expert who not only started the ball rolling with tagging locations, but also figured out ways for us to link the variant spellings for our indexed people and places.

**Debora Dameri** is an alumna of the victorious Team France, who I pulled in to support Team Yale. She has a tireless eye for detail, has un-snarled a team full of non-Italian speakers (myself especially) as we confuse our elision, apheresis, raddoppiamento sintattico, and the question of winds vs directions, and has always done so with a generosity of spirit and willingness to teach those of us who can use all the help we can get!

**Valeria Federici** can always be counted on to step up and pitch in, jumping on transcriptions that haven't been done, geotagging winds and port cities, and always adding to our Zoom calls with her acute observations and suggestions.

**Patricia Larash** finds the interesting questions in the text, such as lexical oddities, 'cipta' for 'citta', or noting that 'autra' has taken the place of 'altra' that lead the team down fascinating linguistic twists and turns and encourages us all to really focus on what we are transcribing.

**Shana Worthen** unfortunately missed the first Zoom meeting, but then jumped into the challenge with both feet, locating, identifying and collating transcription standards and participating in our slack discussions, and has, without fail, offered to 'do more pages' save the four she was slated to revise.

**Anna-Amicia Litwinska** is our furthest afield participant, hailing from Russia and joining us for her first taste of medieval manuscripts (see her blog post for more). She's been our slack channel marshal, making sure all the questions get addressed and chipping in with welcome suggestions and additions, at one point gently asking me if she ought to correct a mistake she found on one of the pages, and the transcription in question was one I had done!

**James Freeman** was the 'eleventh' man called in at the eleventh hour to replace a missing member of the original team! Despite joining us a week late, he jumped on our second Zoom call, quickly revised his pages, and made sure that we didn't remain 'a man down'!

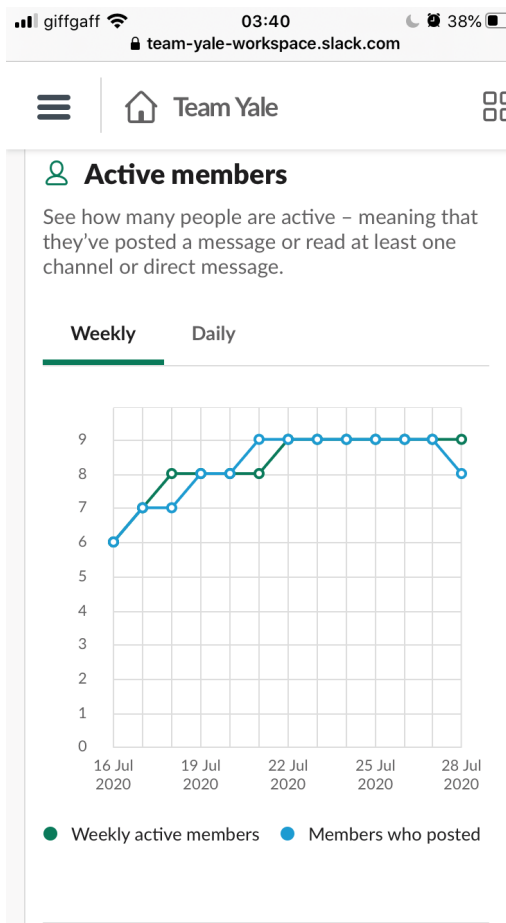
Together we are Team Yale!

### **Third, the aforementioned update to how we've been working together over the past two weeks:**

A much shorter update this time, namely about the ways in which Team Yale has been working together, across 7 time zones to finalise our transcription of Yale, Beinecke MS 946. We started a few hours after the official challenge kick-off with a Zoom call to meet one another and divvy up the transcriptions and 'revisions' amongst the members of our team. Each of our ten members got 4 pages to transcribe, and 4 pages to 'check' after they had been completed by their initial transcriber. Two of our native speakers, Deb and Valeria, valiantly volunteered to check the Italian of the entire transcription, adding apostrophes for missing letters, finding

overlooked palaeographical flubs, as well as breaking or recombining words as needed — given our scribe’s habit of inserting spaces in a rather haphazard manner, I know I certainly wouldn’t have guessed that ‘affare’ is two words and the break is between ‘a’ and ‘ffare’! (p. 50)!

We set up a Slack channel from the beginning for questions and conversations. At the time of writing, 329 messages have been sent and received, and given the 9 members of the team on Slack, I think our analytics graph speaks for the consistent dedication and participation of all the members of Team Yale!



Our second Zoom meeting took place six days later where we ironed out palaeographical conventions, and discussed final steps to completing the challenge. Caterina and I volunteered to be the final editors, and Aaron mentioned an interest in indexing and linking subjects – little did we know how engrossing that would become. Over the last few days, the team has rallied together to tag every place, every constellation, every person, and even every named wind (which we categorised under ‘places’ as they represent ‘places on the compass rose’). It’s worth recognising those who decided to go beyond the expectations of the challenge in identifying some 300 subjects in 65% of our manuscript (I can affirm, the other pages just didn’t have terms we were indexing), namely Debora, Valeria, Lara, Anna, Aaron, as well as Caterina and Anne.

And that brings us to today, the final day of the second instalment of La Sfera Challenge II (The Revenge of Mabel). We’ll submit the transcription conventions, blog posts, and completed manuscript to the judging panel in a few hours, so all that’s left is my thanks, to my team, to the challenge organisers, to the judges, and all those who have participated (even if they may be our rivals). Good luck to all, but may Mabel look favourably upon Team Yale!

### **And Fourth, and finally, a two part note about place names, longitude, and Dati’s connection to modern seafaring!**

Unlike our previous blog posts, this post instead represents the collection of the work of three disparate authors, Caterina Agostini, myself (Anne McLaughlin), and Oliver Cole (who is not a member of Team Yale, but who’s connection to the project will hopefully become clear). To distinguish between my editorial comments from the work of each author, my comments will appear in Italics below.

*Most of yesterday’s work on both Slack and on our transcription document focused not on the transcription of the manuscript, but instead upon the indexing, or tagging, the geographical locations, constellations, and the named winds as they appear in the text by creating linked “subjects” to use the From the Page parlance. Toward the end of the evening I jumped on a Zoom call while a few of our Team Members, namely Debora, Anna, Aaron and Caterina continued a discussion about winds and navigation as referenced in Dati’s text, the post below was written by Caterina as a reflection on their discussion.*

As we progressed with our transcription as a team, we realized that geospatial information is an important component throughout the text of *La Sfera*. The cardinal points, for example, are named traditionally by the rising and the setting of the sun. Furthermore, Goro Dati wrote the names of the winds, which at that time corresponded to cardinal directions, so the words for winds were interchangeable with cardinal directions. Thus, in a classical compass or wind rose, one would find directions for wind names expressed in the *lingua franca* that was used across the Mediterranean Sea for navigation purposes.

The cities, mountains, seas, lakes, and populations mentioned in Dati's text would often be found on portolan charts at the time, when coastal navigation was a common practice. When the author discussed timekeeping (folio 14r), he referred to coastal navigation, a safe way to travel across familiar waters. Almost all cities mentioned are coastal, so that ancient portolans would refer to them in a variety of forms and spellings, of which our manuscript captures a portion that is culturally specific to Goro Dati. From Dati, we learn that "one needs a watch to understand how many hours they moved, with a certain wind, and establish how many miles per hour they traveled. Then, you will see where they are" ("Bisognia l'orologio per mirare / quante hore con un vento sien andati / et quante miglia per ora arbitrare / e troverrai dove sono arivati"). For a long time, sailors measured time to determine the ship's position because it was not possible to establish longitude at sea, or time at night. Dava Sobel's *Longitude* (1995) reconstructs the story of finding longitude at sea and the discovery of clockmaker John Harrison in the 18th century.

A list of the resources we used to check Italian and the knowledge of ancient geography can be found at the end of this post.

*Across both instalments of the La Sfera Challenge, I've been struck by the extent to which discussion of the work that we're doing here has gone beyond the boundaries of our respective teams and instead bled out onto twitter and social media and into conversations with family, friends and colleagues. Yesterday evening was case in point. When I left the group to join a Zoom call with some old college friends, one of the participants was Oliver Cole, an active duty member of the US Coast Guard. In what has become a weekly catch-up, I've spoken a bit about the not only the transcription work that we've been doing for the past weeks, but after relating yesterday's team discussion about the use of the names of various winds to indicate direction and times to indicate distance, he remarked that similar practices are still used when braving the high seas, even in the modern era. After remarkably little cajoling, he composed what may be the first 'guest post' in either iteration of the La Sfera Challenge, discussing the relevance to Dati's work to the present navigational practice, just as the Challenge itself has taken Dati's manuscripts and interpreted them in a modern, digital format.*

### A Modern Perspective on the History of Nautical Navigation

"Seaman's eye" is one of the first terms many aspiring deck watch officers are likely to learn aboard their first ship. This is the technique of looking out from the ship to determine its relative position to hazards, land, and where the officer intends to navigate, based on one's knowledge of surrounding depths, nearby landmasses, and sea and weather conditions. It varies from common sense mostly in nomenclature and the level of experience required to apply it. What is common to the mariner is less so to the landlubber.

Of course, navigational techniques now taken for granted by the average mariner are built on centuries of hard experience and much suffering and loss at sea. Humans had been plying the sea for time immemorial by the time longitude could be accurately calculated onboard ships, a feat made possible John Harrison's development of an accurate chronometer.[1] Similarly, early nautical charts were based on mariner's observations of their experiences at sea.[2] The lengths of time taken to transit between ports, estimates of



coastal topography, and depths measured by hand. Given the limited resources available, many of these charts are remarkably good but they are often quite limited by modern standards. In some cases, they hardly constitute useful navigational aids any more than being told to “sail west.”

Modern navigation would not be what it is today without these early efforts, limited though they may have been. In fact, many similarities can be noted when comparing ancient charts to modern ones. Reference lines, windrose, depths, and scales are among common features which though more accurate today, have long been integral to navigation. It is similarly telling that as seafaring increased in sophistication standard reference materials for mariners began to be published. The *Mariner’s Mirror* was published in 1588.[3] The legendary nautical reference, *The American Practical Navigator* by Nathaniel Bowditch was originally published in 1802 and can still be found on the bridge of every properly equipped ship today.[4]

Progress in the art and science of navigation has been iterative. Although the ease and accuracy of nautical navigation has improved tremendously in recent years with increasingly accurate nautical charts and position fixing through global positioning systems, the goals and principles of navigation are largely unchanged. Mariners still need to find their position on our sphere, chart a voyage, and stay on course. Though challenging, this has been possible since well before mariners could determine their longitude or reference the *Mariner’s Mirror*. It starts with that common sense of the seas known as “seaman’s eye” and, as history shows us, that knowledge can only stand to grow with time and experience.

Oliver Cole is a lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard who is a deck watch officer on three classes of ship. Lieutenant Cole is also a Navy qualified navigator and former commanding officer of the Coast Guard Cutter Shrike (WPB-87342). He is currently a graduate student at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Advanced Governmental Studies.

[1] Jonathan Betts, “John Harrison: inventor of the precision timekeeper,” *Endeavour*, 17 no. 4 (1993): 160-167.  
**[https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-9327\(93\)90056-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-9327(93)90056-9)**.

[2] Joaquim Alves Gaspar and Henrique Leitão, “What is a nautical chart, really? Uncovering the geometry of early modern nautical charts,” *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 29 (2018): 130. **<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2017.09.008>**.

[3] Susan Rose, “Mathematics and the Art of Navigation: The Advance of Scientific Seamanship in Elizabethan England.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004): 183. **<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3679313>**.

[4] Nathaniel Bowditch, *The New American Practical Navigator*, (Newburyport: Cushing and Appleton, 1802).  
**<https://archive.org/stream/newamericanpractooowd#page/n7/mode/2up>**.

Useful resources for checking Italian place names and for ancient geography:

Anton Gordieiev, “Place Names of the Black Sea and Sea of Azov Coasts from Portolan Charts of XIV-XVII centuries,” **Academia.edu**, Kiev 2015

Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni et viaggi*, II, 1559 (**<http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/index.html>**)

*Atti della Società ligure di storia patria*, 1858 (**<https://archive.org/details/attidellasocietloosoci>**)

*Grammatica geografica*, 1756

(**[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Grammatica\\_Geografica\\_ovvero\\_analisibrev/BepkAAAACAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=grammatica+geografica+gordon+1776&pg=PA5&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Grammatica_Geografica_ovvero_analisibrev/BepkAAAACAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=grammatica+geografica+gordon+1776&pg=PA5&printsec=frontcover)**)

*Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini*, **<http://tlio.oivi.cnr.it/TLIO>**

*Tommaseo online*, **<http://www.tommaseobellini.it>**

*Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612), Giovanni Alberti, Venezia.

— (1623), Jacopo Sarzini, Venezia.

— (1691), stamperia dell’Accademia della Crusca, Firenze.

**July 30:** TEAM YALE is wrapping up the transcription project, which was much more than transcription. Here is a blog post by Anna Amicia Litwinska:

**<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KkiTdaPlaO8huTLgS9gJMxW5WKOBJj5PFQ6IcHJ8mo/edit>**

Stay tuned for more blog posts!



It's a matter of perspective: The world is yours — or is it ours?

**July 6:** TEAM YALE is recruiting! Want to join us? Contact co-captains via Twitter or -email: Caterina Agostini (@CateAgostini, caterina.agostini@rutgers.edu) and Anne McLaughlin (@anmclo01, am2539@corpus.cam.ac.uk).



**Anne McLaughlin**  
@anmcl001



Come work with me & [@CateAgostini](#) for [#LaSferaChallenge2](#) to transcribe Dati's rhyming description of the heavens and earth! Who wouldn't want to work with this lovely little [#manuscript](#), [@BeineckeLibrary](#) MS 946: [brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/...](http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/...)



**Laura Morreale** @LauraMorreale · Jul 6

Yale's Beinecke Library working with team captains [@CateAgostini](#) [@anmcl001](#)  
[lasferachallenge.wordpress.com/team-1/](http://lasferachallenge.wordpress.com/team-1/)

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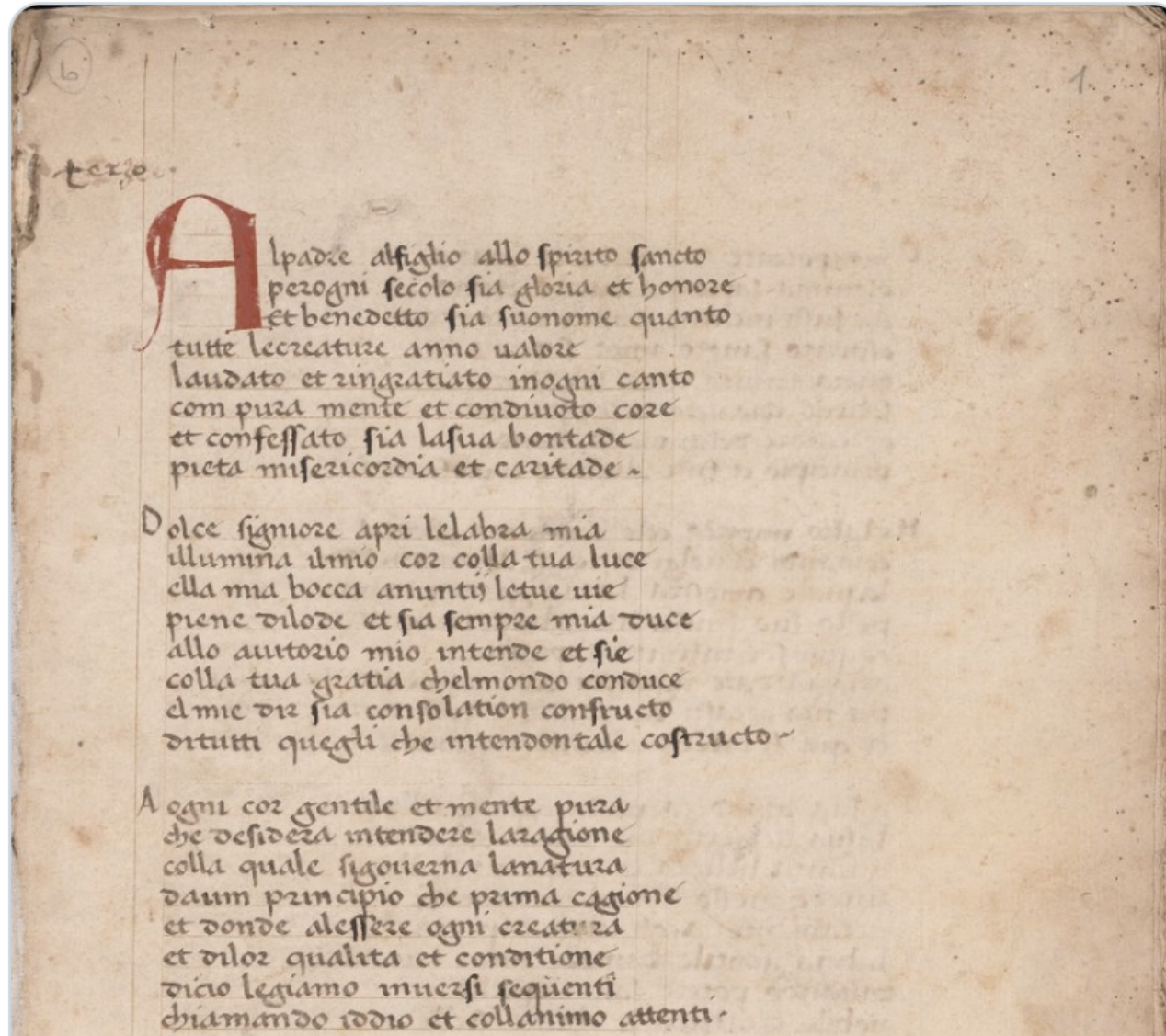


**Caterina Agostini**  
@CateAgostini



Join us for [#LaSferaChallenge2](#)! We are building a team to transcribe Goro Dati's book, "La Sfera." [#medievaltwitter](#) [#RenTwitter](#) Do you love manuscripts, geography,

astronomy, cosmology, pre-modern Italian? Let's chat with you potential team members! DM [@anmcl001](#) and [@CateAgostini](#)





1:02 PM · Jul 6, 2020



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TEAM YALE members so far include:

- Caterina Agostini, Co-Captain
- Anne McLaughlin, Co-Captain
- Lara Harwood-Ventura, McGill University
- Aaron Macks, Harvard University
- Debora Dameri, Archivio Storico del Comune di Modena
- Valeria Federici, National Gallery of Art
- Patricia Larash, Boston University Academy
- Shana Worthen
- Anna-Amicia Litwinska
- James Freeman, Cambridge University Library

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