

## Fragments of Freedom: Dante's Relic in the Re-United States

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Tuscan, that wanderest through the realms of gloom,  
With thoughtful pace, and sad, majestic eyes,  
Stern thoughts and awful from thy soul arise,  
Like Farinata from his fiery tomb.<sup>1</sup>

The haunting image of Dante arising from these verses is eerily doubled. We see the poet in exile, full of sorrow but noble in bearing, roving the hills, valleys, towns, and by-ways of Italy; we also see, like a superimposed negative, the specter of the character Dante, assailed by fear, horror, and anguish as he traverses the infernal circles of lost souls. One region of Hell in particular adds to the ghostly ambiance: circle six, the cemetery of the heretics, those who, in their rejection of God, “l’anima col corpo morta fanno” [“have the soul die with the body”] (*Inf.* 10.15).<sup>2</sup> Suffering in burning sepulchers, the heretical souls are treated just like the bodies they considered their one and only state of being. Only they were wrong. Souls are immortal, and so their “bodily” suffering is likewise eternal. Grimly ironic, this may be Dante’s most terrifyingly effective *contrappasso*, the logical relationship between sin and punishment. Based precisely on the relationship between body and soul, this correspondence in the circle of heresy is also a stunning recognition of the tomb as a gateway between life and death, the place where the living and the dead commune with one another. Here the magnanimous shade of Farinata degli Uberti, a political enemy of Dante’s ancestors, stands in his “fiery tomb” to converse with the wayfarer, a living Tuscan, about their common homeland. Thoughts—“stern” and “awful” ones—similarly arise from Dante’s soul, a comparison conjuring the bone-chilling prospect of the poet’s voice issuing from his grave.

These opening lines of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Dante” turn out to be more haunting than the American poet could have ever imagined when he wrote the sonnet in 1845, for it was not only Dante’s poetic voice that escaped its sepulchral confines. Dante’s body had also left its original gravesite in Ravenna, as the world learned when workers found his bones while removing part of a wall connected to the Braccioforte chapel some twenty-five feet away from the tomb.<sup>3</sup> The serendipitous discovery took place on May 27, 1865, less than two weeks after festivities in honor of the poet’s six-hundredth birthday in Florence, which had recently replaced Turin as Italy’s capital. Only four years since gaining independence—and awaiting the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Dante,” in *The Complete Writings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*. Craigie edition. 11 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904–17), 1:262.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Turin: Einaudi, 1975). All citations of Dante’s poem are from this edition. Unless otherwise specified, all English translations from Italian texts are my own.

<sup>3</sup> Romolo Conti, *La scoperta delle ossa di Dante* (Ravenna: Angeletti, 1865); Municipio di Ravenna, ed., *Della scoperta delle ossa di Dante: relazione con documenti per cura del Municipio di Ravenna* (Ravenna: Angeletti, 1870); Primo Uccellini, *Relazione storica sulla avventurosa scoperta delle ossa di Dante Alighieri* (Ravenna: Angeletti, 1865); Edward Moore, “The Tomb of Dante,” *English Historical Review* 3, no. 12 (1888): 633–54; Corrado Ricci, *L’ultimo rifugio di Dante Alighieri* (Milan: Hoepli, 1891), 329–73.

additions of Venice in 1866 and Rome in 1870 to complete unification—Italy turned Dante’s birthday party into a lavish celebration of its emergence as a nation.<sup>4</sup>

Giuseppe Mazzini and other liberal proponents of a unified Italy in the 19th century lionized Dante as the “profeta della nazione italiana” [“prophet of the Italian nation”].<sup>5</sup> An icon of Italian literary history who honored Italy’s Roman and Christian heritage while calling for an end to the political factionalism and papal interference that kept Italy “enslaved” (*Purg.* 6.76–151), Dante appealed to advocates of competing national narratives. These narratives, as Adrian Lyttelton has shown by examining the legacy of the Lombard League and the Sicilian Vespers, were often grounded in the “new, positive evaluation of the Middle Ages” championed by Italian Romanticism.<sup>6</sup> Dante, more effectively than any other individual or event from the past, enabled Italian patriots of all stripes to imagine an independent and unified Italy—the sort of “imagined community” emerging from the interaction between capitalism and print culture identified by Benedict Anderson as the basis for a modern nation.<sup>7</sup> With his death and burial in exile, Dante served as a physical—not just a literary—reminder of Italian aspirations for nationhood to many who worshiped at his tomb in Ravenna. But Dante came to be seen as a prophet not only of and for Italy. Exemplifying Giambattista Vico’s creative conception of burial (*humando*) as the bedrock of human civilization, to which it gives a name (*humanitas*),<sup>8</sup> Dante’s gravesite and its relics carried the poet’s voice of liberation far beyond Italian shores.

When Italian patriots, such as Ugo Foscolo in 1799, and their supporters, such as Lord Byron in 1819, visited Dante’s tomb,<sup>9</sup> they did not know it had lain empty since the early 16th century. Knowledge of the empty tomb only came with discovery of the poet’s remains during renovations in preparation of Ravenna’s celebration of his six-hundredth birthday in 1865. Tumbling out of a plain pine box opened by the blow of a pickax, Dante’s bones were gathered and taken into the nearby *tempietto* or “little temple” housing his original sepulcher. Medical experts who examined the remains determined that they belonged to Dante, thus corroborating the identification penned on planks of the makeshift coffin. In separate Latin inscriptions Brother Antonio Santi, chancellor of the Franciscan convent in Ravenna at the time, had recorded his viewing of Dante’s bones on June 3, 1677, and his placement of them in the pine box on October 19, 1677. It was later concluded that the Friars had most likely raided Dante’s tomb in 1519 to prevent Florentine emissaries, backed by a Medici pope (Leo X), from taking the exiled poet’s bones from Ravenna to his native city. The Franciscans presumably kept Dante’s remains under

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Clark Barlow, *The Sixth Centenary Festivals of Dante Allighieri in Florence and at Ravenna* (London: Williams, 1866); Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification: The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, “Dante,” *Apostolato popolare*, September 15, 1841, repr. *Scritti editi ed inediti* (Milan: Daelli, 1862), 4.2:19–32, at 32.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Lyttelton, “Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento,” in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna Von Henneberg (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; rev. ed. London: Verso, 1991), 37–46.

<sup>8</sup> Giambattista Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ed. Pasquale Soccio (Milan: Garzanti, 1983), 223.

<sup>9</sup> Foscolo describes an emotional visit to Dante’s tomb in March 1799 in *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (in *Opere*, ed. Franco Gavazzeni, 4 vols. [Milan: Ricciardi, 1995–96], 2:674). Byron’s visits to the tomb in June 1819 are recorded in a letter to John Cam Hobhouse (*Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973–82], 6:189); in *Medwin’s Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 158; and in Filippo Mordani, *Elogio storico di Giorgio Lord Byron* (Ravenna: Roveri, 1841), 15.

close watch on their property until, forced by Napoleonic law to evacuate the convent in 1810, they hid Santi's box of bones in the wall where workers accidentally came upon it in 1865.

The chance discovery of Dante's skeleton revealed the absence of a number of bones, including the lower mandible. Only three missing pieces—two hand bones and one foot bone—were found in the original tomb when it was opened eleven days later to confirm that the skeleton was indeed Dante's. Unscrupulous individuals, most driven by self-serving claims of devotion to Dante, predictably exploited the chaotic aftermath of the discovery. Abusing their privileged access, they pocketed bones and bone fragments from the site, which, having once served as the church cemetery, proved a generous provider of skeletal pieces. Although many of these ill-gotten remains were returned to Ravennese authorities over time, only one was shown to be authentic—the others belonged not to Dante but to other individuals, not all of them even human. The single genuine remain, a bone from Dante's finger, was reunited with the rest of the poet's skeleton following its exhumation and examination in 1921 on the six-hundredth anniversary of his death.<sup>10</sup>

Various smaller traces of Dante's physical afterlife were also lifted from the sites where his bones had been found and examined in the spring of 1865. These funeral mementos consisted mostly of particles or dust collected from the *tappeto*—the “little rug” or cloth—on which the bones and the planks of the coffin had been laid out for examination. The precise nature of these material traces (dirt, wood chips, cloth fibers, bone specks?) has never been scientifically determined, but there is no doubt that for many admirers—out of reverence for Dante as “divine poet,” holy man, or Italy's secular saint—the particles carried the status and power of bona fide relics.<sup>11</sup> For true believers, even if the dust samples were shown to contain no evidence, however minuscule, of Dante's body, they would still qualify as sacred objects or relics simply because they had once touched the poet's bones.<sup>12</sup> Escaping notice in official, published reports on the bones, nearly all these relics have been traced to Enrico Pazzi, the sculptor whose colossal statue of Dante had been unveiled in Piazza Santa Croce on May 14, 1865, the first day of the poet's sixcentenary birthday celebrations in Florence. After the discovery of Dante's remains on May 27, Pazzi was back in Ravenna for the opening of Dante's original tomb on June 7, the examination of his bones on June 11, and their reburial on June 26.<sup>13</sup> Authenticating documents accompanying the relics, duly witnessed and notarized, identify Pazzi as the one who gathered the “Dante dust.”

However, one relic stands apart from the rest. Consisting of fragments of the coffin in which Dante's bones were found, this artifact—accompanied by the requisite statement of authenticity—is the only one not to bear Pazzi's fingerprints. And while none of the reported

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<sup>10</sup> Fabio Frassetto rejected the other alleged pieces of Dante, one of which he identified as part of a lamb's skull (*Dantis ossa: la forma corporea di Dante, scheletro, ritratti, maschere e busti* [Bologna: Università di Bologna, 1933], 13–14).

<sup>11</sup> The term *reliquia* (relic) is frequently used to describe this material: Desiderio Chilovi, “Per la collezione dantesca,” *Bollettino delle pubblicazioni italiane ricevute per diritto di stampa* 87 (1889): LVIII; Ludovico Perroni-Grande, “Per una reliquia: delle ceneri di Dante a Messina,” *Letterine dantesche* (Messina: Trimarchi, 1900), 81–89; Francesco Stocchetti, “L'abate Giuliani e un raro cimelio dantesco,” *La Nazione*, October 11, 1928, 3; Mario La Rosa, “Un medaglione con le ceneri di Dante custodito in una stanza del senato,” *Il Tempo*, October 17, 1968, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Secondary or “contact” relics are discussed by Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 7–8; James Bentley, *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics* (London: Constable, 1985), 42–43; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011), 136–39; and Alison Knowles Frazier, *Possible Lives: Authors and Saints in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2–6.

<sup>13</sup> Municipio di Ravenna, ed., *Della scoperta*, LV, LXI, LXXI; Conti, *La scoperta*, 36.

contact relics were ever returned to Ravenna, this is the only one known to have left Italy altogether, crossing the Atlantic in 1870 and coming into Longfellow's possession in the summer of 1872.<sup>14</sup> In his historic house at 105 Brattle Street in Cambridge, the American poet and Dantophile guarded his precious pieces of Dante's coffin "with reverential care."<sup>15</sup> Longfellow kept the relic in a small decorative casket on a table in his study, the same room in which General George Washington had frequently consulted with military officers and political leaders during the Siege of Boston in 1775–76.<sup>16</sup> A shrine to Dante and Washington—fathers of their nations—Longfellow's study was animated with the spirit of liberty and independence. Rendered more sacred by the presence of Dante's relic not many years after Italy's unification and America's Civil War—a "new Revolution," to Longfellow's mind, necessary to realize the Constitution's "more perfect union" by ending slavery—the room joined Italy's ancestral father not only to George Washington but also to Abraham Lincoln, father of the "Re-United States."<sup>17</sup> A beacon of freedom, Longfellow's Dante illuminated the two great American liberators from his new home in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Dante's pervasive message of freedom—spiritual liberation from sin but also political emancipation—rang ever more true and timely to Longfellow's ears as the divided nation fought over the fate of Southern slavery. Throughout this tumultuous period he worked on his translation of the *Commedia*, completing a draft of *Inferno*—and so the entire poem (having first translated *Purgatorio* and then *Paradiso*)—on April 16, 1863 before turning to revisions and notes (*Life*, 3:21). Two decades after publication of Longfellow's *Poems on Slavery* in 1842, New York's *Evening Post* cast him as the nation's prophet. Lincoln had proclaimed the emancipation of slaves, and the Civil War had been raging for nearly two years. Crediting Longfellow's "discerning eye" for foreseeing "the inevitable result of that institution of American slavery which was the black spot on the escutcheon of our republican government," the paper lamented that his words had gone "unheeded, until the black spot spread into a cloud of portentous dimensions, and broke over the land in a storm of blood and desolation." The article concluded by reprinting one of Longfellow's poems denouncing slavery ("The Warning") so that "those among us who are so apathetic, even now, on a matter in which is involved our very existence as a nation, might feel the truth of the oracle, and rouse themselves to a proper appreciation of the solemnity and importance of self-preservation!"<sup>18</sup> Upon reading the report by Senator Charles Sumner, his close friend, on the Fugitive Slave Bill in 1864, Longfellow went

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Chesley Mathews includes an entry on these "several little fragments of wood from Dante's coffin" ("Longfellow's Dante Collection," ed. Christian Y. Dupont, *Dante Studies* 128 [2010]: 302).

<sup>15</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Elizabeth Lawrence, July 20, 1872. *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Andrew Hilen, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1966–82), 5:568.

<sup>16</sup> On the Siege of Boston and Washington's nine months in Cambridge, see David McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 3–112, and J. L. Bell, *George Washington's Headquarters and Home: Historic Resource Study* (National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, February 29, 2012, <https://www.nps.gov/long/learn/news/upload/George-Washington-s-Headquarters-and-Home-Cambridge-Massachusetts.pdf> [consulted August 4, 2016]).

<sup>17</sup> *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: With Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence*, ed. Samuel Longfellow, 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), 2:396. At a banquet in honor of foreign dignitaries in Florence for the Dante sexcentenary (May 17, 1865), an American speaker's recognition of the "Stati Riuniti" drew great applause from the Italian hosts and their guests (Barlow, *Sixth Centenary*, 62).

<sup>18</sup> "Poet's Warning," *The Evening Post*, January 10, 1863, 2.

beyond abolition in articulating the importance of making blacks in America full citizens and the consequences of not doing so: “Until the black man is put on the same footing as the white, in the recognition of his rights, we shall not succeed, and what is worse, we shall not deserve success” (*Letters*, 4:406).

At the urging of Charles Eliot Norton, Longfellow published a translation of *Inferno* as a gift to Florence for the sixcentenary celebrations to be held there in May 1865 (*Life*, 3:22). In the same letter in which Longfellow asked Sumner to have his translation sent to Italy “in commemoration of the six hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dante Alighieri,” he rejoiced over congressional approval of the amendment ending slavery (*Letters*, 4:464). Aptly couching his reaction to the extraordinary event in Dantean terms, he declared that 1865 “will always be the Year of Jubilee in our history.” The *Inferno* translation sent to Italy that year was one of a small set (most likely ten copies) Longfellow privately published at the time. He distributed the remaining copies as gifts to friends—including one to Norton—or held on to them himself. Longfellow followed the same procedure for *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* over the next two years, publishing a private set of each canticle for friends and himself, even as he continued to revise the translation and write notes for eventual commercial publication. As he did for *Inferno*, he had one copy of the privately published *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* brought to Italy (in May 1867), prevailing upon T. Bigelow Lawrence, US Consul General in Florence, to deliver the volumes in person to Guido Corsini, secretary for the Commission of the Dante Centenary.<sup>19</sup> Corsini thanked Longfellow profusely for the gift of these “due rimanenti volumi della sua preziosa traduzione” [“two remaining volumes of your precious translation”].<sup>20</sup>

On October 25, 1865, Longfellow hosted the first gathering of what he called the “Dante Club,” a small group of learned friends who shared his passion for Dante’s poetry (*Life*, 3:62). At meetings over the course of eighteen months (*Life*, 3:87), he read and discussed cantos of his translation with the group, using their comments and suggestions to refine the work. For public dissemination of the complete work, each canticle published separately by Ticknor & Fields in 1867, Longfellow wrote six sonnets—two per canticle—as epigraphs to his English rendering of Dante’s poem. The second sonnet for *Paradiso*, composed on March 7, 1866, begins by placing Dante on a pedestal as a harbinger and symbol of freedom:

O star of morning and of liberty!  
O bringer of the light, whose splendor shines  
Above the darkness of the Apennines,  
Forerunner of the day that is to be! (1–4)<sup>21</sup>

Longfellow recognizes Dante as the acclaimed prophet of his descendants’ independence, the poet whose song is repeated over the centuries “till the familiar lines / are footpaths for the thought of Italy!” (7–8). But this great liberator is not for Italians only. Dante’s message reaches “all the nations” as his

fame is blown abroad from all the heights,

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<sup>19</sup> T. Bigelow Lawrence to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, May 25, 1867. MS Am 1340.2, folder 3351, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>20</sup> Guido Corsini to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, May 24, 1867. MS Am 1340.2, folder 1317, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>21</sup> *Complete Writings*, 3:150–51.

[...] and a sound is heard,  
as of a mighty wind. (9–11)

People of good will outside Dante’s time and place—above all those fighting for freedom—“in their own language hear [his] wondrous word” (13). His liberating “sound” is heard clear across the ocean in the 19th century, inspiring African American “freedom readers”—as Dennis Looney titles his book on the subject—such as the orator Frederick Douglass and the poet H. Cordelia Ray, in addition to New England Brahmins like Sumner and Longfellow. The sonnet gives voice to Looney’s claim that Dante in this period “had become a fixture in the politics of the liberal world on a par with none less than Lincoln.”<sup>22</sup>

Knowledge that Dante’s bones had been discovered in Ravenna on May 27, 1865, just eleven days after national celebrations of his six-hundredth birthday in Florence, inevitably revealed a more disturbing fact: the bones had been missing from their tomb in the first place. When Longfellow learned of this double-edged news from the *Athenaeum*,<sup>23</sup> he shared it with George Washington Greene, sending to the friend who had introduced him to Dante many years earlier the “curious paragraph” on the bones, and wondering: “Can it be true?” (*Letters*, 4:495). Remarking that “the same thing happened to Shakespeare, and pretty much in the same way,” Longfellow explained, “Irving mentions it in the Sketch Book; though the old sexton who looked in at the hole ‘could see neither coffin nor bones; nothing but dust.’” Washington Irving indeed wrote a story, “Stratford-on-Avon,” in which an old sexton recalls how, in the attempt to dig a vault, earth caved in, creating an opening through which he “had made bold to look in at” Shakespeare’s grave and saw “nothing but dust.”<sup>24</sup> The experience of Irving’s sexton accords with the belief that excavation for a burial vault in 1796 inadvertently exposed Shakespeare’s adjoining grave, creating an opening that, as the bard was buried in the ground and not in a vault of his own, may very well have revealed only dust.<sup>25</sup>

Clement Mansfield Ingleby, a 19th-century Shakespeare scholar, nonetheless lobbied (unsuccessfully) to dig up Shakespeare’s body for the purpose of comparing the skull with representations of the poet’s likeness. To justify Shakespeare’s disinterment, he reviewed the practice of exhuming the bones of other illustrious individuals, including Friedrich Schiller, Raffaello Sanzio, John Milton, Oliver Cromwell, Emanuel Swedenborg, King Charles I, Robert Burns, and Ben Jonson. Even as Ingleby proposed to unearth Shakespeare’s remains, however, he acknowledged the real possibility that the skull had been stolen, meaning someone would have brazenly ignored the famous warning-plea on the gravestone composed by Ben Jonson or another admirer, if not by Shakespeare himself:

Good friend, for Jesus’ sake forbear,  
To dig the dust enclosed here.

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<sup>22</sup> Dennis Looney, *Freedom Readers: The African American Reception of Dante Alighieri and the Divine Comedy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 63. However, white Southern writers, as Joshua Matthews has shown, typically venerated Dante not as an advocate of universal freedom and a unified nation but rather as a proponent of local (read: states’) rights and gentlemanly patriotism (“The *Divine Comedy* as a Civil War Epic,” *The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1, no. 2 [2013]: 315–37).

<sup>23</sup> “Our Weekly Gossip,” *Athenaeum*, June 10, 1865, 784–85.

<sup>24</sup> Washington Irving, “Stratford-on-Avon,” in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, ed. Haskell Springer (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 213.

<sup>25</sup> C. M. Ingleby, *Shakespeare’s Bones: The Proposal to Disinter Them, Considered in Relation to Their Possible Bearing on His Portraiture* (London: Trübner, 1883), 31, 47.

Blessed be the man that spares these stones,  
And cursed be he that moves my bones.<sup>26</sup>

Shakespeare's "curse," so far as we know, has worked. It has prevented sanctioned disinterment of the bones for scientific examination or translation to a more venerable location—as well as (one hopes) wanton acts of theft and vandalism. Longfellow's pithy aside that "the same thing happened to Shakespeare" as to Dante was therefore plainly wrong. If some devoted follower or, better, if Dante himself, the incomparable prophet of life beyond the grave, had thought to plant a curse against anyone who dared upset his mortal remains, perhaps they—like Shakespeare's bones—would have been left in peace.<sup>27</sup> Then again, Longfellow had little reason to complain: only because no curse or other obstacle prevented Franciscan Friars from raiding Dante's tomb in the early 16th century—to keep Florentine emissaries from doing the same—did he learn of a Dante relic in this letter sent from Doylestown, Pennsylvania on June 3, 1872, here transcribed in full for the first time:<sup>28</sup>

*Dear Mr. Longfellow*

*I am very much flattered by your kindness in sending me a volume of your latest poems & consider it a very high compliment to be remembered by you in so charming a manner. To the many regrets I must always experience whenever I think of dear Florence, my once beautiful home, I must now add the knowledge of your failure to carry out your kind intention of giving us a Poet's welcome on our return—a return which it was the will of Heaven I was to make alone.*

*I was about to send with this note a small piece of Dante's coffin—or rather a piece of the box in which his ashes were placed at the moment when they were hidden for safety within the walls of the church at Ravenna by the monks of the adjacent convent. But I find alas that my precious relic has disappeared from the cabinet which originally contained it. It was doubtless stolen before it left Florence & notwithstanding my annoyance, when I remember the fair city's "remorse of ages" I almost look upon the theft as a pardonable one.*

*With cordial regards*

*Believe me*

*dear Mr. Longfellow*

*sincerely yours,*

*Elizabeth Lawrence*

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<sup>26</sup> Alan S. Downer, "For Jesus' Sake Forbear: Shakespeare vs. the Modern Theatre," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1962): 219. Ingleby's transcription, with original spelling, reads: "Good friend for iewes sake forebeare, / To digg the dust enclosed heare: / Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones, / And curst be he yt moves my bones" (*Shakespeare's Bones*, 45).

<sup>27</sup> Though recent research, using radar imaging, has provided evidence in support of the claim that, in the words of the project manager, "William's skull is no longer there" (Christopher D. Shea, "Alas, Poor William Shakespeare. Where Does His Skull Truly Rest?" *New York Times*, March 25, 2016, C3).

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Lawrence to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, June 3, 1872. MS Am 1340.2, folder 3345, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Hilén cites a small portion of the letter in a note to another letter (*Letters*, 5:568, n.1).

The writer of these words lived the thirty-six years of her widowhood (1869–1905) in high style, prompting the novelist James Michener, a Doylestown native who recalled looking as a child at her extravagant mansion (“Aldie”) in their hometown, to remark that her life “demonstrates yet again that a feisty widow with a million dollars can have one hell of a time.”<sup>29</sup> Well known for her independent spirit and her glamorous life in world capitals, including Washington, Elizabeth inspired Henry Adams to create Madeleine Lee, the wealthy widow starring in *Democracy: An American Novel*, published anonymously in 1880.<sup>30</sup> Longfellow knew Elizabeth from the time of her marriage to T. Bigelow Lawrence, heir to a large fortune generated by New England textile mills. She moved to Italy in 1862 when Lincoln appointed her husband US Consul General in Florence—Colonel Bigelow presented Longfellow’s translations of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* to the city in 1867. Elizabeth’s love for the country where she lived for seven years, combined with her patronage of the arts (she helped finance the original Boston Museum of Fine Arts), drew her more deeply into Longfellow’s circle of friends and admirers. She frequently socialized with Longfellow’s brother-in-law, Thomas Gold Appleton, with whom the poet remained close after his wife tragically died from injuries sustained when her dress caught fire from sealing wax on July 9, 1861. Elizabeth, who had felt the “dreadful shock” that hit Boston at news of Fanny Longfellow’s death,<sup>31</sup> likewise lost her spouse prematurely. While in Washington to attend the inauguration of President-elect Grant, Colonel Lawrence caught a cold that grew steadily worse, taking his life less than three weeks later on March 21, 1869. He left his wife, just shy of her fortieth birthday, a very wealthy woman. Longfellow was traveling through Europe at this time with his children and siblings (*Life*, 3:110–18), apparently intending to give the Lawrences a “Poet’s welcome” upon their return to Florence—a return, Elizabeth now recalls in sadness, “it was the will of Heaven [she] was to make alone.” She went back to Florence in 1870 to oversee the packing of household items she and her husband had amassed during their years in the villa rented from the Marchese Torrigiani,<sup>32</sup> a site still known today for the beautiful gardens that once delighted the Lawrences.

Elizabeth lamented the loss of her “small piece of Dante’s coffin” because she had hoped to reciprocate Longfellow’s gift of poetry—*Three Books of Song* or *Christus: A Mystery*, both published in 1872—with this “precious relic.” But the relic, “alas,” had disappeared, “doubtless stolen before it left Florence,” much as Dante’s bones had been stolen from their tomb in Ravenna centuries earlier. The missing relic thus seemed poised to add another chapter to the story of Dante’s post-mortem tribulations. But Elizabeth “almost” managed, despite her “annoyance,” to “look upon the theft” of her coveted item as “pardonable” when she recalled, quoting another worshiper of Dante (and his tomb), Florence’s “remorse of ages.” Byron showed no mercy toward Dante’s native city when he wrote those words in 1817:

Ungrateful Florence! Dante sleeps afar,  
Like Scipio, buried by the upbraiding shore;  
Thy factions, in their worse than civil war,  
Proscribed the bard whose name for evermore  
Their children’s children, would in vain adore

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<sup>29</sup> James A. Michener, introduction to *E.L.: The Bread Box Papers: The High Life of a Dazzling Victorian Lady: A Biography of Elizabeth Chapman Lawrence*, by Helen Hartman Gemmill (Doylestown, PA: Tower Hill, 1983), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Gemmill, *Bread Box*, 208–11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

With the remorse of ages.<sup>33</sup>

Florence's remorse for having exiled Dante grew with its failure to atone for this ancestral sin by retrieving his mortal remains from Ravenna. Byron passed even harsher judgment in *The Prophecy of Dante*, a dramatic monologue in Dante's voice and rhyme scheme (*terza rima*) begun in 1819 at the suggestion of Byron's lover Teresa Guiccioli and inspired by "the sight of [Dante's] tomb," which he "passed in [his] almost daily rides."<sup>34</sup> Recalling how his love of Florence was rewarded with banishment, Byron's Dante foresees a time when Florence will regret her cruelty and seek

[...] to have  
the dust she dooms to scatter, and transfer  
of him, whom she denied a home, the grave. (1.74–76)

But with ironclad logic worthy of *contrappasso*, the law by which the punishment in Dante's Hell fits the sin in life, he pronounces the inexorable sentence for Florence's crime: "she denied me what was mine—my roof, / and shall not have what is not hers—my tomb" (1.83–84). Taking a far more charitable view than Byron, Elizabeth Lawrence spins Florence's "remorse of ages" for having lost Dante—in death as in life—into a reason to forgive ("almost") the Florentine who must have stolen her "precious relic" of Dante's physical afterlife before she and her husband left the city.



Fig. 1. Dante's coffin fragments. Courtesy National Park Service, Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site. Photograph by the author.

But it turns out her "pieces of Dante's coffin," unlike the bones this coffin once held, had not been stolen after all (fig. 1). At most they had been temporarily misplaced. On June 16, 1872,

<sup>33</sup> George Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 4.505–10, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), vol. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Moore, ed., *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of His Life* (Paris: Galignani, 1830), 304; Thomas Medwin, *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 158.

less than two weeks after Elizabeth lamented the disappearance of the relic, Charles C. Perkins, Chairman of the Committee of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (known then as the Athenaeum), wrote the introduction to the museum's collection catalog. Listed among "objects loaned by Mrs. T. B. Lawrence" is item 411, A:

FRAGMENT OF DANTE'S COFFIN. Given to Col. T. B. Lawrence in 1868 at Ravenna. Attested as genuine by the mason who preserved these pieces when the coffin was discovered on the 27th of May, 1865.<sup>35</sup>

Whether the relic had gone missing or Elizabeth Lawrence simply forgot she had donated it to the museum, she gave the good news to Longfellow on Independence Day in 1872, two years after Congress had declared July 4 a national holiday, that she "was never more gratified than on finding the lost relic of Dante in one of the cases of the Art Room."<sup>36</sup> She was especially pleased because Longfellow had proposed to send her one of the private copies of his translation of the *Divine Comedy* printed in 1865–67. She would now be able to reciprocate this "very high compliment" with the precious coffin fragments. So "impatient" was Elizabeth to "feel [herself] the owner of so valuable a possession" that she asked Longfellow to send it to her summer residence in Newport right away rather than to her home in the fall.

Elizabeth may have found Dante's coffin fragments but, she writes in the July 4 letter, certain "seals and vouchers" that authenticated the relic "seem to have disappeared." Soon after, she also located this documentation, which had enabled the museum catalog to say "attested as genuine by the mason who preserved these pieces," and Longfellow eventually took possession of it along with the relic. By "seals and vouchers" Elizabeth meant a small rectangular piece of parchment on which Fedele Spada, the master mason who claims to have gathered the coffin fragments when Dante's bones were found on May 27, 1865, vouches for their authenticity in front of three witnesses in Ravenna the following day (fig. 2).<sup>37</sup>

Ravenna 28 Maggio 1865

Io Mastro Moratore Nativo di Cesena, e dimorante qui in Ravenna da tre anni circa, sotto al capo Mastro Moratore Luigi Felletti ed essendo a lavorare nei scavi di Bracio Forte il Giorno 27 di questo mese ed essendo rinvenuta la cassetta delle ossa del Divino Dante, che rimastimi quatro frantumi di detta cassa in mio potere lo regalata all'Amico mio Luigi Casamenti librajo e comisionario in oggetti antichi e che per pura verità mi firmo alla presenza dei qui uniti Testimoni  
Raggi Napoleone Giuseppe Alberoni teste  
Scipione Gordio teste  
Fedele Spada

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<sup>35</sup> Charles C. Perkins, *Catalogue of the Collection of Ancient and Modern Works of Art, Given or Loaned to the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, at Boston* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1872), 39.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, July 4, 1872. MS LONG 27930, box 1, folder 35, Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>37</sup> Fedele Spada, Document Authenticating Dante's Coffin Fragments. MS LONG 27930, box 4, folder 68, Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

[Ravenna 28 May 1865

I, Master Mason, born in Cesena, residing here in Ravenna for about three years under head Master Mason Luigi Felletti, while working in the excavations of Braccio Forte on the 27th day of this month, after the discovery of the little chest containing bones of the Divine Dante, four broken pieces of said chest remaining in my possession, I gave them to my friend Luigi Casamenti, the book seller and antiques dealer, and I affirm this is the absolute truth in the presence of the witnesses gathered here.

Raggi Napoleone, Giuseppe Alberoni witnesses

Scipione Gordio witness

Fedele Spada]

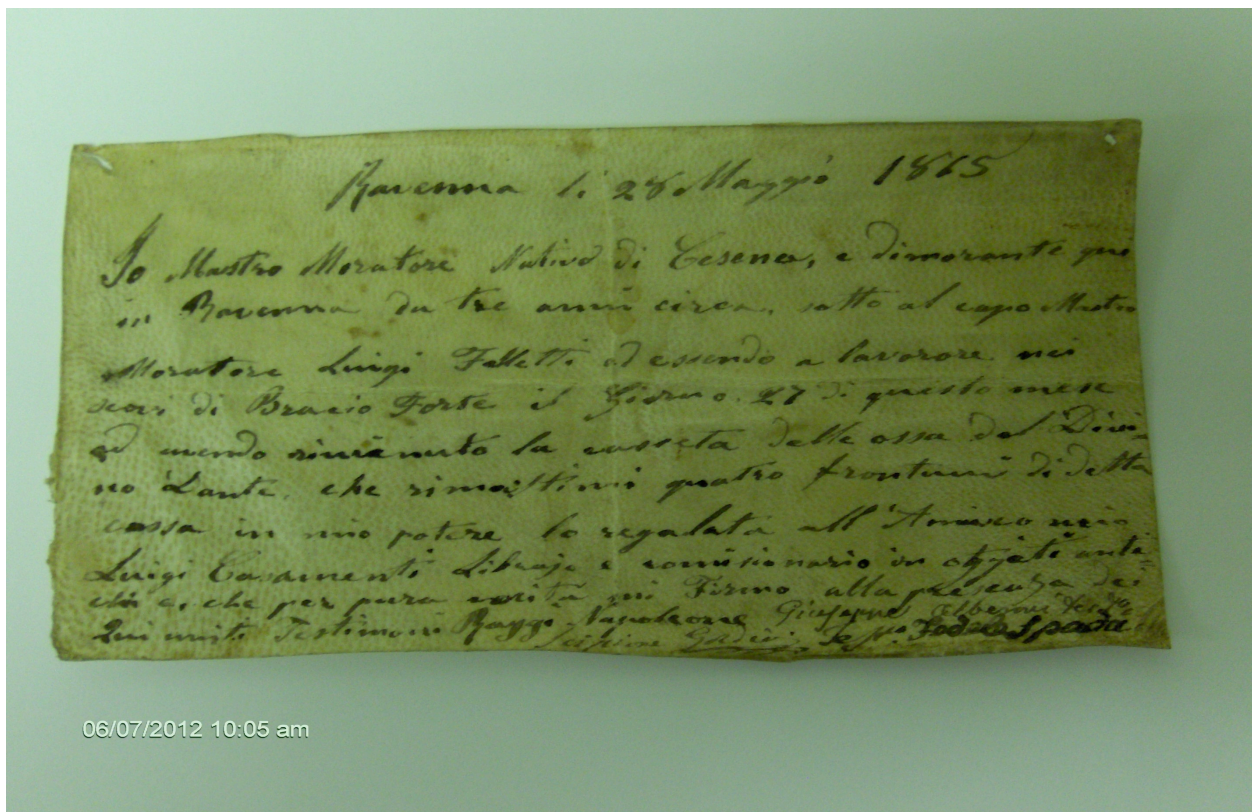


Fig. 2. Fedele Spada's authenticating document. Courtesy National Park Service, Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site. Photograph by the author.

Originally from Cesena, a large town less than twenty miles south of Ravenna, Spada worked under head mason Pio di Luigi Feletti on the Braccioforte excavations that unearthed Dante's bones. Although he did not dislodge the bones from the wall—that honor goes to Feletti and an illiterate laborer, Angelo Dradi<sup>38</sup>—Spada, as part of the work crew that fateful morning, apparently used his access to the site to pocket a few fragments that fell off planks of the pine box that held the bones. The distinctive signature of one of the three witnesses to Spada's signed

<sup>38</sup> Municipio di Ravenna, ed., *Della scoperta*, XLIX–L, LIV.

statement, Napoleone Raggi, also appears on a document admitting him into the “Associazione dei Reduci Garibaldini” [“Association of Garibaldian Veterans”] on May 24, 1896.<sup>39</sup> Like Spada, he came from Cesena and worked for a time as a *muratore* or stone mason. Raggi fought with Garibaldi in the war against Austria in which Italy gained possession of the Veneto region a year after the discovery of Dante’s bones. An autodidact, he won a seat on Ravenna’s city council and designed and built several buildings (including his own house) in the province.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike the sculptor Enrico Pazzi, who collected similar relics from the site, and his collaborators—the scholar-priest Giambattista Giuliani and the notary Saturnino Malagola—Fedele Spada and his peers came from the lower echelons of Italian society. Luigi Casamenti, the “book-seller and antiques dealer” to whom Spada presented the coffin fragments, may have claimed higher social standing. His occupation, in any case, drew T. Bigelow Lawrence to his shop in Ravenna in the summer of 1868.<sup>41</sup> Already owning a first-rate collection of armor and weapons from medieval Europe that “surpassed any other” in the United States,<sup>42</sup> Colonel Lawrence was perhaps perusing Casamenti’s inventory in hopes of adding a sword or shield to his collection when he learned of the Dante relic and struck a deal to purchase it. Anyone of Lawrence’s means and social position with a connoisseur’s passion for Italy and the Middle Ages would have relished the opportunity to own a relic of Dante’s physical afterlife. But Lawrence had additional motivation: he and Elizabeth had been in Florence during the sixcentenary festivities in 1865 and well remembered how, as she later wrote to Longfellow, “the flurry then was all over Italy at the discovery” of Dante’s bones.<sup>43</sup>

Acquired in Ravenna, Dante’s coffin fragments remained in the Lawrences’ residence in Florence until Elizabeth returned in 1870, the year after her husband’s death, and shipped it to America along with the Colonel’s prized collection of medieval arms and the rest of their household possessions. While the relic was only placed on loan at the Athenaeum, Colonel Lawrence intended for the weapons and armor to find a permanent home there. His last will and testament, executed on April 26, 1869, stipulates that while Elizabeth inherits all his other possessions “for her own absolute property,” he bequeaths his “valuable collection of ancient armor, and of ancient and modern arms [...] to the Proprietors of the Boston Athenaeum.”<sup>44</sup> However, since the Athenaeum could not provide a “suitable apartment” for public display of the collection—an “express condition” of the will—the executors stored it in a warehouse in

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<sup>39</sup> Laura Montanari, *Un garibaldino da museo: Napoleone Raggi nella Romagna politica tra 800/900* (Ravenna: Danilo Montanari, 2009), 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–29.

<sup>41</sup> Not the summer of 1869, as Elizabeth Lawrence mistakenly writes in her July 4 letter. Her husband had died before then (March 21, 1869), and—as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana points out—Longfellow included a slip of paper with the relic that states: “A Part of Dante’s Coffin Presented to T. B. Lawrence at Ravenna. 1868” (Letter to Elinor Gregory Metcalf, November 29, 1944. TS LONG 27390, box 6, folder 21 [folder 25 in finding aid], Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA). Dana himself makes several errors in his translation of the authenticating parchment and in his letter explaining the relic’s history, including the identification of Spada as the mason who discovered the bones, and the rendering of Casamenti’s occupation (“librajo e comisionario in oggetti antichi”) as “librarian and custodian of antiquities.”

<sup>42</sup> Obituary of Col. Timothy Bigelow Lawrence, “Report of the Council,” ed. Seth Sweetser, in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, at the Semi-Annual Meeting, Held in Boston, April 28, 1869* (Worcester, MA: Hamilton, 1869), 12–14, at 13.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, July 26, 1872. MS LONG 27930, box 1, folder 35, Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>44</sup> *Will of Timothy Bigelow Lawrence: Who Died in Washington, D.C., March 21, 1869* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1884), 3, 9.

anticipation of final placement in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts soon to be built. Dante's relic luckily escaped the fate of the precious collection slated for museum life: destruction in the Great Fire that swept through central Boston on November 9–10, 1872.<sup>45</sup> "Everybody seems to have lost something who had anything to lose," Longfellow wrote to Greene three days after the catastrophe (*Life*, 3:211). Elizabeth later thanked him for a note of sympathy on her loss of this cherished part of her husband's legacy.<sup>46</sup>

Dante's coffin fragments—safely ensconced in the Athenaeum in the summer of 1872—meanwhile awaited transfer to Longfellow. Elizabeth hoped this would occur as soon as possible. "The great heat and a slight indisposition have prevented me from at once placing the relic in your hands," she informed him on July 4, reassuring him that she had "made arrangements that it should reach [him] in a few days." Reflecting on Longfellow's literary fame and his devotion to Dante, she felt "a deep sense of poetic fitness" in giving her piece of Dante's graveyard history to the translator of Dante's poem of the spiritual afterlife. Longfellow needed more time to take physical possession of the relic, but this delay did not stop him from sending the private edition of his translation that he had promised to Elizabeth. On July 8, 1872, Longfellow inscribed the rare three-volume set to "Elizabeth Lawrence with kind regards of the translator."<sup>47</sup> Having "arrived in great safety" at Elizabeth's Newport residence, Longfellow's signed, privately published volumes became "the ornament of [her] little salon." "I am the envy of all who have seen them," she gushed on July 13, "& I feel I cannot sufficiently thank you making me the possessor of so valuable a gift."<sup>48</sup>

Summering with Elizabeth in Newport, Thomas Gold Appleton witnessed her pride and joy in owning Longfellow's private edition. "Mrs. L\_\_ is in constant delight contemplating" the translation, he reported to the poet on July 19, "which she has on a little table by itself" (*Life*, 3:204). Hoping that Longfellow, in turn, had received the Dante relic, the "incorrigible" Appleton flashed the rakish wit for which he was so well known in Boston society.<sup>49</sup> "I am curious to hear what you will be doing with them," he teased his famous brother-in-law, "leave them as they are, or imprison them in gold and precious stones." Writing to Elizabeth from his summer residence at Nahant on July 20, Longfellow explained that he had not yet removed the relic from the Athenaeum because she placed it there and he believed "it is safer there for the present than anywhere else" (*Letters*, 5:568). He also expressed "great pleasure" in knowing the joy his Dante volumes had brought to her. But "your pleasure," he insisted, "cannot be half so great as that you have given me by the very precious Dante relic." Fearing he had not thanked her enough for the gift, he promised to "always keep it and guard it with reverential care." In his reply to Appleton the following day, Longfellow confirmed that he would leave "those sacred fragments of Dante's coffin" in the Athenaeum until his return to Cambridge in September "partly because Mrs. Lawrence put them there, partly because [Charles] Perkins has them in his Catalogue; and partly because that is the safest place for them at present" (*Letters*, 5:570). He

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<sup>45</sup> Gemmill, *Breadbox*, 185–87.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, January 24, 1873. MS Am 1340.2, folder 3345, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>47</sup> Joan Nordell, "Search for the Ten Privately Printed Copies of Longfellow's Translation of the *Divine Comedy* 'In Commemorazione del secentesimo Anniversario della Nascita di Dante Alighieri,'" *Dante Studies* 128 (2010): 88. The location of Elizabeth's copy is unknown since being sold at auction in 1960 (93).

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, July 13, 1872. MS LONG 27930, box 1, folder 35, Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>49</sup> Dana to Elinor Gregory Metcalf; Gemmill, *Bread Box*, 161; Louise Hall Tharp, *The Appletons of Beacon Hill* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 319–35.

repeated that he “know[s] not how sufficiently to thank Mrs. L. for so valuable and rare a present,” thinking, “[p]erhaps the best thanks of all will be shown by my faithful and affectionate guardianship of this relic of the great Italian.”

“[A]ltogether at a loss” as to how to quell Longfellow’s fear that he had not thanked her enough for the relic, Elizabeth reassured him that it was “a very rare pleasure to [her] to have done so appropriate a thing.”<sup>50</sup> “My only regret is that the little relic is not in your possession,” she wrote, adding that Charles Perkins of the Athenaeum promised to deliver it personally to Longfellow that summer in Nahant. Whether Perkins fulfilled this promise or Longfellow, as planned, retrieved the relic on his return in September, Dante’s coffin fragments received an honorable welcome in the poet’s Cambridge study that fall. Writing to Longfellow on January 24, 1873, Elizabeth was “truly sorry not to have seen the ‘carved oaken casket’” in which Longfellow had placed the Dante relic, but she “shall hope for that pleasure” on her next visit to Boston.<sup>51</sup> In this miniature casket, now thought to be carved from walnut in the 18th century,<sup>52</sup> Longfellow guarded the coffin fragments “with reverential care.” Rather than “imprison them in gold and precious stones,” as Appleton had half-joked, he placed them in the casket along with a number of related items, including—as seen in Figure 3—Fedele Spada’s authenticating parchment, a photo of the mason, and Primo Uccellini’s pamphlet on the discovery of Dante’s bones, written in Ravenna on June 12, 1865, two weeks after they had been found.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 3. Coffin fragments, authenticating document, photo of Fedele Spada, Primo Uccellini’s pamphlet. Courtesy National Park Service, Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site. Photograph by David Daly.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, July 26, 1872.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, January 24, 1873. MS Am 1340.2, folder 3345, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>52</sup> James A. Shea, “Longfellow’s House and the Power of Place,” *Dante Studies* 128 (2010): 13.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana, “Longfellow and Dante,” ed. Christian Y. Dupont, *Dante Studies* 128 (2010): 262.

Venerated as a tangible piece of Dante's legacy in a room filled with historical significance, the relic was also an object of curiosity occasionally serving a more mundane purpose. One of Longfellow's neighbors told the story of a girl from California struck "shy and silent" by the presence of America's most famous poet in an age when poets enjoyed the celebrity status of today's pop music stars. Seeking to put his young visitor at ease, Longfellow placed the small glass case in her hands, saying, "Think of it! Six hundred years ago the bit of wood in that box touched Dante's bones." Historical inaccuracies aside—the stolen bones were placed in the coffin in 1677, about two hundred years earlier—Longfellow's odd gesture succeeded in breaking the ice, and soon the girl was playing the piano and "chatting with him as freely as if she had not entered his door with a timidity amounting almost to fear."<sup>54</sup> Among other "treasures" drawing the attention of visitors to Longfellow's study were inkstands once belonging to Samuel Coleridge and Tom Moore and two canes or walking sticks, one of them "made from the spar of the ship on which 'The Star-Spangled Banner' was written" by Francis Scott Key in 1814.<sup>55</sup> Wood from the coffin of Dante—the champion of liberty in the 19th century—and wood from the British naval vessel on which Key composed enduring verses in praise of "the land of the free" fittingly shared the room that saw Washington set the course for American independence. Longfellow, who noted such chronological correspondences as Good Friday in 1864 falling on the same date—March 25—in 1300, the year of Dante's journey,<sup>56</sup> would have no doubt delighted in knowing that Key scribbled those historic words after seeing the US "flag was still there" at daybreak following the British bombardment of Fort McHenry during the night of September 13–14—the same hours in which Dante drew his final breaths in Ravenna in 1321.

When the eminent Swiss *dantista* Giovanni Andrea Scartazzini called America "the new Ravenna of the great poet," he referred to how the United States had become Dante's new home by the end of the 19th century.<sup>57</sup> As Ravenna had provided a refuge for the exiled poet in the final years of his life, so America preserved and promoted his legacy nearly six centuries later through major contributions to Dante studies, such as Longfellow's annotated translation (1867) and Edward Allen Fay's concordance (1888), and through adoptions of the poet's "children in the shape of bibliographical curiosities" by US libraries and archives. Scartazzini, in his late twenties when Dante's bones had been discovered on May 27, 1865, recalled the rush "with all speed to Ravenna" to see them displayed at the end of June, wryly remarking, "these were golden days for the local innkeepers!"<sup>58</sup> He never imagined that a literal piece of the poet's afterlife had also left Italy for residence in the United States. But if he had, he no doubt would have smiled knowing that a relic of Italy's most famous victim of factional violence—the prophetic father of Italian unity and independence—graced the former home of America's founding father as this nation slowly recovered from a dreadful civil war fought to honor its own promise of human freedom.

Relics and funeral monuments bring the deceased to life by encouraging each generation to reflect on and study anew the lives, achievements, and legacies of illustrious ancestors. But this

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<sup>54</sup> W. Sloane Kennedy, *Henry W. Longfellow: Biography, Anecdote, Letters, Criticism* (Boston: Lothrop, 1882), 179.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> *Letters*, 4:400. "Five hundred and sixty-four years ago to-day," Longfellow continues in his letter to Greene on March 25, 1864, "Dante descended to the *città dolente*; and to-day with the first two Cantos of the *Inferno* in my hand, I descended among the Printers' Devils, the Malebranche of the University Press."

<sup>57</sup> G[iovanni] A[ndrea] Scartazzini, *A Companion to Dante [Dante-Handbuch]*, trans. Arthur John Butler (London: Macmillan, 1893), 477.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

trace of Dante's graveyard history in Cambridge, Massachusetts has broader significance: more than a memorial to the poet or a generic *memento mori*, it stands in historical context for the noble ideal of liberty—of and within the United States as well as of Italy—that Dante embodied for freedom fighters on both sides of the Atlantic. Longfellow actively joined this good fight in his own quiet way. His deep and longstanding devotion to Dante produced a translation of the *Commedia* whose influence on the appreciation, study, and promulgation of the poet's works in America "cannot be overestimated,"<sup>59</sup> and in word and in deed he followed the steps of the Florentine's "care piante" (*Inf.* 23.148)—his "dear feet"—on the road toward justice and freedom for a larger portion of humanity. Longfellow allowed Dante's voice to rise from his grave in Ravenna and find new life as the "star of morning and of liberty" in the New World.

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<sup>59</sup> Angelina La Piana, *Dante's American Pilgrimage: A Historical Survey of Dante Studies in the United States, 1800–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 109.

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