In the almost forty years since he first enunciated his thesis, Paul O. Kristeller's view that the Italian humanists were essentially rhetoricians has found wide acceptance. His analysis of the humanist movement, however, indicates that he includes among the humanists' interests the four other disciplines comprising, along with rhetoric, the studia humanitatis: grammar, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. His decision to characterize the humanists as rhetoricians rather than as grammarians, poets, historians, or moral philosophers derives from his interpretation of the professional role played by the humanists in their society. For Kristeller the humanists performed the same professional functions in their world as the medieval dictatores did in theirs. Both groups were primarily teachers of rhetoric and chancery officials, and both devoted a substantial portion of their creative efforts to composing in two literary genres, the epistle and the oration. The single major difference separating the humanists

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from the *dictatores* came from the concern of the former to base their writings on models drawn from classical texts.¹

Because his thesis endeavors to characterize humanism generally, Kristeller is not concerned with tracing its evolution in great detail. He suggests that humanism owes its origin in part to influences coming from France in the late thirteenth century, in part to native Italian sources of inspiration, but he does not view humanism developing directly out of *ars dictaminis*, the method of composition followed by the medieval *dictatores* for achieving eloquence.² Furthermore, he stresses the importance of grammatical studies to the humanists and recognizes that the two chief earliest humanists, Petrarch and Boc-

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¹ His original statement of the thesis is found in “Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance,” *Byzantion*, 17(1944–45), 345–374; most recently published in *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. M. Mooney (New York, 1979), pp. 85–105. Reference to this article will be from the latter work. Also see in the same volume “The Humanist Movement,” pp. 21–32.

In presenting his thesis Kristeller was motivated by a desire to give precision to our understanding of humanism as a historical movement by viewing it in terms of its link with the learned tradition of Western Europe and humanism’s institutional connections. For his enumeration of the basic *studia humanitatis*, see “The Humanist Movement,” p. 22; and “Humanism and Scholasticism,” pp. 92 and 98; and for his detailed discussion of humanist achievements in these areas, see *ibid.*, pp. 25ff. and 92ff. Stressing that humanism arose out of a concern for grammatical as well as rhetorical studies (“Humanism and Scholasticism,” p. 91), Kristeller focuses on the relationship between the humanists and the Italian medieval grammarians and rhetoricians (*ibid.*, p. 94). His definition of the humanists as rhetoricians and their relationship to the medieval *dictatores* is found in “The Humanist Movement,” pp. 23–24; and “Humanism and Scholasticism,” pp. 92–93.


In his interpretation of Kristeller, Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (Princeton, 1968), p. 200, exaggerates Kristeller’s position when he writes that humanism “evolved principally” from *ars dictaminis* and that the latter “carried the seeds of humanist classicism.” Moreover, whereas Kristeller uses the term *dic-
caccio, as well as Erasmus later do not fit into his general conception of the movement. Nonetheless, his position is that the humanists taken as a group were professional rhetoricians.

The primary purpose of this essay is to deal diachronically with ars dictaminis and humanism rather than synchronically as does Kristeller. In the process I distinguish two phases of humanism. In its origins an essentially grammatical-philological movement, humanism throughout the fourteenth century existed side by side with ars dictaminis to which it conceded control of oratory and official epistolography, the prime fields for the rhetorician. Consequently, although in this century many humanists were at the same time chancery officials and teachers of rhetoric, their humanistic interests were essentially limited to their private lives.

If in the fifteenth century humanism to a large degree still allowed ars dictaminis to preside over diplomatic correspondence, it extended its hegemony over oratory. The remolding of oratory on classical lines meant that humanists were finally able to integrate the studia humanitatis with their professional work in chanceries and in schools of rhetoric. Consequently, most humanists in this century fit Kristeller’s general characterization of the movement as rhetorical.

Prior to any discussion of this twofold development of humanism, however, attention must be given to defining medieval ars dictaminis. Early Italian humanism arose as a reaction of grammarians to the pretensions of this medieval rhetorical tradition, but as indicated above, the classical reformers were both unable and unwilling to drive ars dictaminis completely from the field. Only when the nature of ars dictaminis is made clear can we understand the extent to which the older movement contrasted with the newer and the reason for the durability of medieval rhetorical inheritance.

While the prescriptions for letter composition predate the manuals

\[\textit{tator} \text{ to apply only to a professional teacher of rhetoric or a chancery official, the tendency of Seigel, \textit{Rhetoric and Philosophy}, pp. 208ff., is to identify notaries as a group and writers of literature generally as \textit{dictatores}. This blurring of Kristeller’s clear definition permits Seigel to consider the proto-humanists collectively as \textit{dictatores} but entails the position that any Italian writing literary works in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries deserves to be counted among the professional rhetoricians.}\]

\[\textsuperscript{3} \text{Kristeller, \textquotedblleft Humanism and Scholasticism,\textquotedblright \hspace{1em} p. 93.}\]

\[\textsuperscript{4} \text{While most humanists in the fifteenth century are aptly described as rhetoricians, according to Cicero’s sharp distinction between rhetoricians and orators, a handful of humanists came close to attaining the status of the ideal orator. See below, p. 33.}\]
themselves, the manuals of *ars dictaminis*, which appear from the last decades of the eleventh century, are a response to the growing demand of the society for instruction in letter writing. Behind this increasing interest in *ars dictaminis* lie three interrelated phenomena: economic, intellectual, and political developments. The economic revival underway by the second half of the eleventh century necessitated and facilitated increased contact within and between the various regions of Europe. Contemporaneously, an intellectual revival created new respect for literacy and literary achievement at the same time as a process of political consolidation gradually served to define relationships between different political authorities and encouraged the creation of lay and ecclesiastical chanceries at all levels of power. While such changes made letter writing more important in general, the needs of the evolving society especially created a demand for professional writers of official letters.

With the exception of the imperial and papal chanceries, those of the king of France and of a handful of bishoprics, most of the chanceries of medieval Europe received their organization in the course of the late eleventh and particularly in the twelfth century. Of course, public authorities had needed trained individuals to conduct their correspondence before this period, but by the twelfth century powers below the pope, emperor, and kings acquired greater definition, and as the level of literacy rose, the need for official documents increased along with the necessity of organizing procedures connected with their composition and dispatch.

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In the case of Italy, the increasing organization of political life from the late eleventh century led not so much to the creation of chanceries as it did to an expansion of demands placed by society on the services of the notaries. Notaries served ecclesiastics, lay lords, and communes alike. In previous centuries Italians had relied on this relatively large group of laymen, for composing letters and other documents necessary for conducting the business of life. Because of the ready accessibility of this trained corps to meet the growing demands for skilled writers, the creation of formal chanceries on a large scale was postponed until the pressure of business in the thirteenth century compelled their formation.\(^7\)

Since the major impetus behind the growing demand for letter writers came from the increasing organization of political power, which made such knowledge economically profitable, letter composition was oriented toward oral presentation of the message within a century as the period for the development of chanceries in Germany and France. Ferdinand Lot and Robert Fawtier, *Histoire des institutions francaises au moyen âge*, I (Paris, 1957), see the first mention of a chancellor in Toulouse at the end of the eleventh (p. 84), in Normandy after 1066 (p. 17), and in Anjou early in the twelfth (p. 40) while Forez apparently does not have a chancery until around 1200 (p. 292). The first appointment of a chancellor in Flanders was in 1089 (Boüard, *Manuel de diplomatie*, p. 117, n. 1). On this chancery see also Walter Prevenier, "La cancellerie des comtes de Flandre dans le cadre européen à la fin du xi\textsuperscript{e} siècle," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 125 (1967), 34–93. The institution of the notariate develops in the *pays de droit écrit* beginning in the twelfth century according to Boüard, *Manuel de diplomatie*, p. 157. The role of *ars dictaminis* teaching in the improvement in style of royal documents in France is uncertain. George Tessier, *Diplomatique royale française* (Paris, 1962), pp. 214–215; and A. Giry, *Manuel de diplomatique* (Paris, 1925), pp. 446–449, comment on the mediocrity of Latin style in the chancery of the early Capetians. Giry, pp. 446–447, notes an improvement from the end of the eleventh century, but this is decades before the *ars dictaminis* comes into prominence in France. On the contemporaneous rise of chanceries in Germany see Harry Bresslau, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Berlin, 1958), I, 593ff.

formal setting. Official communications, particularly important letters, were often read aloud by the recipient or in the recipient’s presence and thus at the moment of communication took on the appearance of an oration. Individuals writing to public powers could be expected to observe the rules of official rhetoric. Circumstances of political and social life, however, encouraged the dictatores to impose on what earlier and later ages considered personal letters the same stylistic practices imposed on others. Because political power continued to affect a wide range of social functions, it was often difficult to separate private from public personalities and individuals from office. Almost without exception the manuals of ars dictaminis devote a large portion of their discussion to fitting the proper salutatory formula to the appropriate political or social status both of the writer and the addressee. Many insist that the level of style is a function of the relative place of the correspondents in the social hierarchy.

Because public needs played a predominant role in initiating the manuals of ars dictaminis, the teachers of the art, the dictatores, saw nothing inappropriate in seeking guidance for letter composition in the ancient handbooks of oratory. By far the most popular were Cicero’s De inventione and the pseudo-Ciceronian Ad Herennium. Had they diligently searched the ancient Roman authors for prescriptions

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8 Official letters were doubtless read aloud as a rule but the extent to which other correspondence was delivered orally cannot be determined. On oral reading of writings see Ruth Crosby, “Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages,” Speculum, 11 (1936), 88–110; and Giles Constable, Letters and Letter-Collections, Typologie des sources du moyen-âge occidental, fasc. 17, A–II (Turnhout, 1976), pp. 53–54. Also see Letters of Peter the Venerable, ed. Giles Constable, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), II, 27, n. 115.


10 For example, Adalbertus, Henry of Francigena, Albert of San Martino, and Paul of Camaldoli. See references in Constable, “The Structure of Medieval Society,” pp. 254–255 and 258–259, with notes. Also Lanham, Salutatio Formulas generally. As contrasted with the private letter, the public letter or missive is a form of institutional rhetoric. See Mario Marti, “La prosa,” in Le origini e il Duecento, ed. Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno, Storia della letteratura, 1 (Milan, 1963), 526. See as well my Coluccio Salutati and His Public Letters (Geneva, 1976), pp. 1 and 8–9; and Kristeller, “Philosophy and Rhetoric,” p. 249. The tendency of dictamen, however, was to blur the distinction between public and private letters.
for letter writing, they would in fact have had to look very hard. The ancient literary legacy provided no elaborate treatment of epistolography to guide future ages. The failure stems partially from the tendency of pagan authors to liken the letter to conversation. The earliest surviving Greek treatise to deal with the letter considers that “the structure of a letter must be loose and not too long.”11 Revealingly, centuries later, Julius Victor concludes his textbook on rhetoric with two short chapters, one devoted to the art of conversation and the other to that of letterwriting.12 Cicero contrasts letters written in “plebeian style” and “everyday words” with the rich variety of styles used in his orations,13 and he is later echoed by Quintilian, for whom letters and conversation demand a loose structure while other writ-


things need one “closely welded and woven together” (Inst. Or., IX, 4, 19).

The familiar style, however, did not apply to all letters. Julius Victor in the fourth century opposes litterae negotiales to litterae familiares,14 while Cicero submits the public letter to the rules governing the oration.15 Similarly Quintilian (Inst. Or., IX, 4, 20) differentiates various types of letters: those dealing with subjects like philosophy and politics, subjects not for him suitably treated in letter form, require a more formal structure. If the theory of letterwriting was largely neglected in the ancient world, therefore, it was not only because the letter was considered to need the flexibility of conversation but also because those letters having the status of official or public communications were thought to fall under the rules governing oratory for which there were many textbooks. For the medieval dictatores the private letter—of which thousands of examples survive for the period—was not formally distinguished from the public letter and like a public communication was assumed to be something very like a speech and amenable to oratorical teachings.16

Alberico of Montecassino, the probable founder of the ars dictaminis manual, proposes to treat “the rhetorical division of every speech, that is, the exordium or proemium, the narratio, the argumentatio, and the conclusio” at the beginning of his discussion of letter composition in the Flores rhetorici dictaminis. To these he adds fifth, the salutatio.17 While briefly touching on the role of narratio, the

14 Ars rhetorica, p. 447.
15 Cicero, De or., II, 12, 49. Demetrius too makes a distinction between the friendly letter and those sent to cities and kings: the latter “should be somewhat more distinguished in style” (p. 113).
16 Joseph de Ghellinck, L’essor de la littérature latine au xii siècle, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1946), II, 67, criticizes the ars dictaminis for misunderstanding the character of the letter as a means of communication: “... en transportant dans le genre épistolaire ce que l’Orator de Cicéron réservait au genre oratoire, appelé à captiver l’oreille pour mieux conquérir l’esprit, ils enlevaient à la lettre tout ce qu’elle pouvait avoir de charme personnel, d’abandon confidentiel, de sentiment et de vie...” While valid for letters of a personal nature as shown below, the criticism is unfounded as far as official letters are concerned.
argumentatio, and the conclusio, the author devotes several lengthy paragraphs to both the salutatio and exordium. Alberico reflects well the tendency to assimilate the letter to a speech when he characterizes the task of the exordium as rendering the reader "attentive, kindly disposed and docile" and illustrates his whole discussion of the structure of the letter by giving examples from speeches found in Sallust.

The language of Alberico's immediate successors reflects a similar tendency to speak of letters as speeches. Under pressure from friends, Adalbertus of Samaria consents to give advice to those wishing to create prose orations (prosaicas orationes) and urges letter writers to adapt their style to the social level of the recipient just as is done in public assemblies. 18 Hugo of Bologna, severe critic and rival of Adalbertus in the Bolognese schools, justifies his brief discussion assigning four parts to the letter as follows:

We have treated these individual points in detail in as much as it is necessary that the orator who desires to persuade (loqui ad suadendum) aptly, distinctly, and in an organized fashion, should open by first acquiring [benevolence?] unless perhaps he is addressing an enemy or some unworthy person. 19

An anonymous Bolognese dictator writing about 1140 appears to define the letter simply as "a speech (oratio) consisting of parts, harmoniously and clearly written, fully expressing the feeling of the sender." 20

None of the early dictatores, however, can be accused of consider-

18 Adalbertus Samaritanus, Praecepta dictaminum, ed. Franz-Josef Schmale, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 3 (Weimar, 1961), pp. 30 and 34.


20 Rationes dictandi, ed. Rockinger, Briefsteller, I, 10. For the false attribution of this work to Alberico see Schmale's edition of Praecepta dictaminum, p. 2 and bibliography, p. 2, n. 2. Schmale dates the work about 1140. Herbert Bloch, "Monte Cassino's Teachers and Library in the High Middle Ages," in La scuola nell'occidente latino dell'alto medioevo, Settimana di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 19 (Spoleto, 1972), p. 588–589, assigns a date after 1137. See especially Mirella Brini
ing the letter identical to a written speech. Alberico indicates awareness that the books of classical rhetoric must be supplemented by teaching on the salutatio, an element intrinsic to the letter but not essential to the speech where the audience is present. He also recognizes that the argumentatio, vital to the speech, can be omitted from the letter.\textsuperscript{21} That his immediate successors provide alternative schemas for structuring the letter, schemas unlike those found in the ancient authors on rhetoric, suggests that they too viewed letters as differing in certain ways from speeches.\textsuperscript{22} Authors of manuals written later specifically designate letters and speeches as two separate categories of communication.\textsuperscript{23}

Nevertheless, the oration remains in important respects the model for the letter. Just as the oration has six parts, so the letter is strictly divided into distinct parts. Frequently the manuals supply a choice of

\textsuperscript{21} Flores rhetorici, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{22} Aldalbertus, Praecepta, p. 33, speaks of three accidentia in the letter written in stilus sublimus: the blandities, causa blanditiei and the petitio (the salutation is not considered part of the letter). Hugo, Rationes, p. 56, offers a three-part letter again with the salutation considered separately. If Schmale is correct about its dating, the Rationes dictandi would be the first manual to outline a five-part letter and include the salutatio (Rockinger, Briefsteller, I, 10). See discussion of Heinz-Jürgen Beyer, ‘‘Die Frühphase der ‘ars dictandi,’’ ’’ Studi medievali, 3rd. ser. 18, No. 2 (1977), 22–23. James J. Murphy, Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts, p. 4, appears to assign a date of 1135 to the treatise.

\textsuperscript{23} See, for example, the anonymous manual from the Vienna MS 246 published by Savorelli, ‘‘Il ‘Dictamen’ di Bernardo Silvestre,’’ p. 203, which divides prose dictamen into epistolare and non epistolare. The latter ‘‘est illud quod non est epistolare nec in se continens epistolam, ut hystorie, invective, exposiciones evangelice doctrine, rhetorice oraciones et huiusmodi.’’ Haskins, ‘‘An Italian Master Bernard,’’ Essays in History Presented to Reginald Lane Poole, ed. H. W. C. Davis (Oxford, 1927), pp. 219–220, dates the manuscript in the time of Innocent III. Compare Savorelli, pp. 192–193 and 200.

While making no specific difference between letters and speeches, Boncompagno devoted his Rhetorica novissima, ed. A. Gaudenzi, Scripta Anecdota Glossatorum, 3 vols. (Bologna, 1888–91), II, 251–297, to composing speeches. Translation of the introduction is found in Lynn Thorndike, University Records and Life in the Middle Ages, Records of civilization, Sources and Studies, 38 (New York, 1944), pp. 41–46. See as
words or phrases appropriate for introducing the particular division. Like the speech the letter normally has an exordium designed to render the listener compliant. This use of an exordium best exemplifies the oratorical character of the letter. The tone of letters, well Alfredo Galletti, L'eloquenza (dalle origini al XVI secolo) (Milan, 1938), pp. 451-454. For Faba's manuals for orations see Parlamenti e epistole, ed. A. Gaudenzi, in his I suoni, le forme e le parole dell'odierno dialetto della città di Bologna (Bologna, 1889), pp. 127-160; and G. Vecchi, “Le arenga di Guido Faba e l'eloquenza d'arte civile e politica duecentesca,” Quadrivium, 4 (1960), 61-90. Faba, Summa dictaminis, ed. A. Gaudenzi, Il propugnatore, NS 3, No. 1 (1890), 331, sees the arenga (exordium) as fitted both for the speech and the epistle. Also see discussion of Galetti, L'eloquenza, pp. 462-466. Another author of a number of manuals on letter writing also composed an ars arengandi. See A. Wilmart, “L’ars arengandi de Jacques de Dinant avec un appendice sur ses ouvrages De dictamine,” Analecta reginensia, Studi e testi, 59 (Rome, 1933), 113-151. Bono da Lucca distinguishes the kind of exordium used in judicial oratory from that found in letters: Cedrus libani in Magistri Boni Lucensis Cedrus libani, ed. G. Vecchi, Testi e manuali, L’Istituto di filologia romanza dell’Università di Roma, 46 (Modena, 1963), p. 66. On the term arenga see Kristeller, “Philosophy and Rhetoric,” pp. 320-321, n. 40.

While all dictatores were flexible in allowing the nature of the material to dictate the number of parts, still there was controversy over the number suitable for the normal letter. Conrad von Mure, Die Summa de arte prosandi des Konrad von Mure, ed. Walter Kronbichler, Geist und Werk der Zeiten, 17 (Zurich, 1968), p. 31, refers to a debate among dictatores as to whether the letter has three or five parts. However, one early thirteenth-century dictator, a certain William by name, maintained that the letter had six parts. See Charles Samaran, “Une summa grammaticalis du xiiie siècle avec gloses provençales,” Archivum latinitatis mediæ ævi, 31 (1961), 215b. William defends the very six-part organization (salutatio, captatio, proverbium, narratio, petitio and conclusio) which Boncompagno in his Palma regards as long ago abandoned. See Carl Sutter, Aus Leben und Schriften des Magisters Boncompagno (Freiburg, 1894), p. 109. Boncompagno puts exordium for proverbium. On vocabulary for introducing parts of letters see, for example, Faba, Summa, in Il pugnatore, NS 3, No. 2 (1890), 348-349; Bene da Firenze, Candelabrum, in Giuseppe Vecchi, “Temi e momenti d'arte dettatoria nel Candelabrum di Bene da Firenze,” Atti e memorie, Deputazione di storia patria per le province di Romagna, NS 10 (1958/9), 163-164; and Thomas of Capua's treatment of linking words in Emmy Heller, Die Ars dictandi des Thomas von Capua, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil. hist. kl., 19, No. 4 (1928/9), pp. 40-41. Significantly, set phrases and a commonly accepted vocabulary of transition are characteristics of oral literature. See Crosby, “Oral Delivery,” pp. 106ff.

Even Boncompagno, who does not regard the exordium as a principal part of the letter (see above, n. 24) devoted treatises to its composition. Although the Isagoge remains unpublished, the Breviloquium is found in Breviloquium di Boncompagno da Signa, ed. Giuseppe Vecchi (Bologna, 1954). The most complete treatment of Boncompagno's conception of the exordium is found in James R. Banker's "Giovanni di Bonandrea's Ars dictaminis Treatise and the Doctrine of Invention in the Italian Rhetorical Tradition of the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1972, pp. 145ff.
even when they are supposedly personal communications, is formal and consciously crafted to evoke the desired response. Both the speech and the letter have concern for efficiency, with no allowance made for digressions that do not serve the central object of the composition.

From the first half of the twelfth century the *cursus* quickly gained popularity because it heightens aural effects and adds to the overall persuasiveness. Whether the style is elaborate or uncomplicated, the *dictator* sought a mellifluous combination of words fitted to expressing the writer’s mind and to charming the recipient. The *dictator* seeks to gloss over conflict and win the recipient’s assent for the author’s petition. There are, of course, instances when a *dictator* feels


27 The *Ars dictandi aureliensis*, Rockinger, *Quellen*, p. 103, for example, refers to *dictamen* as “literalis edicio, venustate sermonum egregia, sententiarum coloribus adornata.” Thomas of Capua, *Die Ars dictandi*, p. 16, speaks of letters written “elegantius et locupletius”; and Bene da Firenze, “Temi e momenti,” p. 138, aims for “lepida suavitas et lepo locutionis” in ordering the words of the letter.

While having the same general purpose in mind, a *dictator* could of course utilize a variety of styles depending on the material and his intention for writing. Boncompagno in contrast to the *stilus supremus* of Orleans insisted on a *stilus humilis* in his *dictamen* manuals. Nevertheless, both in his *Amicitia* (*Amicitia di Maestro Boncompagno da Signa*, ed. Sarina Nathan, Miscellanea di letteratura del medio evo, 3 [Rome, 1909]) and his *Rota Veneris* (fac. ed. and trans. Josef Purkart [Delmar, N.Y., 1975]) he relied on a highly figurative style not unlike that of his French opponents. Also see Witt, *Coluccio Salutati*, p. 34, n. 3. Guido Faba composed his own correspondence in three styles. See James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1974), p. 237.

28 This is essentially the thesis of Banker, “Giovanni di Bonandrea’s *Ars dictaminis Treatise.*” Banker focuses on the *dictatores*’ manipulation of the established values of the society to achieve persuasion. As he writes of Faba (p. 108): “Faba’s invention was not a method of discovering the contradictions and conflicts in society; rather, he sought through his salutation and *exordium* a means of veiling conflict within more permanent values and discovering the persuasive in the accepted values of his society.” He sees Faba (p. 110) as being able “to stroke all the strings of the hierarchical instrument.”
compelled to compose a letter chiding a correspondent, but even then he strives for harmonious expression and elegance. When a superior writes to an inferior, the burden of the commands is balanced by the assurance of benevolence. When the letter emanates from an inferior, the persuasive power of the request derives from the profession of love and respect made by the petitioner for his lord.

The letter has a ritualistic quality derived from strict adherence to a limited number of rules. A large portion of every manual is devoted to discussing the salutatio and exordium which consist of formulas cast to please and convince the addressee. On the other hand, very little care is given to treating the narratio. The dictatores in fact believe the narratio should be reduced to the briefest statement of the facts. Horace's dictum on brevity (Arspoet., 25–26) became an iron rule.\(^{29}\) If the major reason for the popularity of brevitas was its appropriateness

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\(^{29}\) Brevitas is an ideal for every writer of ars dictaminis: for instance, Alberico, Flores, p. 53; Adalbertus, Praecepta, pp. 30 and 50; and Paul of Camaldoli, Paris Bib. nat., MS lat. 7517, fol. 56ª. Both the De inventione, I, 20, 28, and the Ad Herennium, I, 9, insisted on brevity in the narratio. Guido Faba, Summa dictaminis, p. 332, refers specifically to the Ad Herennium in his teaching on the narratio.

in official letters, it was enhanced through the aesthetic pleasure which accrued to a message condensed into a few highly crafted lines in prose meter.

Letters conceived on such impersonal lines suited official purposes very well. Diplomacy particularly requires an elaborate protocol by which subtle changes in formulas or structure constitute signals of altered attitudes and situations. The early humanists had the good sense to realize this and to make concessions to established practices. On the other hand, dictamen's tyranny of stylistic prescriptions discouraged spontaneity and direct expression of thought and feeling which give the personal letter its character. Furthermore, the demands of brevitas meant that dictatores had little space for the philosophical ruminations and anecdotal meanderings found in the private letters of other ages.

An exception to the general tendency of the dictatores to stress the harmony of wills between writer and recipient as a technique for persuasion appears early in the thirteenth century with a group of dictatores working in the imperial and papal chanceries. These writers develop a consciously oratorical style, aptly called the stilus rhetoricus and probably influenced by the crusade sermons of the previous century. The letters of the first generation of representatives of this

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30 See below, p. 32.
31 The increasing popularity of ars dictaminis constitutes a major cause of the drying up of the rich production of epistles characteristic of the major writers of the "Twelfth Century Renaissance." As has been said, Ghellinck (n. 16, above) considers the ars dictaminis to have had a disastrous influence on epistology. He faults dictamen manuals (p. 66) because they did not use the letters of the ancients as examples and were not "assez perspicaces pour distinguer du genre oratoire les exigences tout autres du genre épistolaire et de toute composition littéraire." Constable, Letters and Letter Collections, pp. 37–38, however, traces the end of the great age of epistology in the twelfth century to the strictures of church reform against monks writing and receiving letters and to the spread of the vernacular languages which reduced the circle of people who could correspond in Latin. On the prohibitions regarding monks, especially the Cistercians, see William D. Paden, "De monachis rithmos facientibus," Speculum, 55 (1980), 669–685. While both explanations have merit, my tendency is to emphasize that of Ghellinck. However the disparity is to be explained, it is important to reemphasize that the decline concerned personal letters and not official ones.
32 For basic analysis of the stilus rhetoricus tradition, see Hans Schaller, "Die Kanzlei Kaiser Friedrichs II: Ihr Personal und ihr Sprachstil," Archiv für Diplomatik; Schriften geschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde, 4 (1958), 277–289; and Wieruszowski, Culture and Politics in Medieval Spain and Italy, Storia e letteratura, 121 (Rome, 1971), pp. 374, 432–434, and 606. A general summary of the genesis of this style seen from the standpoint of the developments at Frederick's court is found in Ettore Paratore, "Alcuni
Whereas the preferred sentence structure of other *dictamen* styles is essentially declarative, that of the *stilus rhetoricus* is interrogative and imperative. As opposed to an approach to persuasion which stresses the harmony of wills, this one acknowledges conflict where it exists, and persuasion takes the form of debate.34

Despite its medieval beginnings, a fresh classicizing impulse emerges from this southern school in the thirteenth century, which in following years moves North along with the popularity of the style. The correspondence of *dictatores* like Peter of Pressa and Henry

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Ibid., p. 287. 34 There is frequently a marked difference between the style used by these *dictatores* in their official letters and those sent out in their own name. When Odofredus, the Bolognese jurist, cites Pietro della Vigna as an example of those “volentes obscure loqui” (quoted by E. Kantorowicz, Kaiser Friedrich II, Ergänzungsband [Berlin, 1931], p. 126) he would have been referring to Pietro’s own correspondence and that of his friends. See these letters published by Jean L. A. Huillard-Bréholles, *Vie et correspondance de Pierre de la Vigne* (Paris, 1865), 289ff. Written in a complex, often figurative style, the *stilus obscurus*, possibly reflecting French influence (see below n. 36), these letters contrast with the *stilus rhetoricus* of the public correspondence of the Magna Curia: *Historia diplomatica Friderici-Secondi*, ed. Jean L. A. Huillard-Bréholles, 6 vols. (Paris, 1852–61). See for example, III, 48–50 and 93–99; IV, 408–411; V, 1014–1017; VI, 186–187 and 705–707. Although more stylistically restrained than those of della Vigna, the letters sent out by Thomas of Capua in his own name differ from those dispatched in that of the popes he served. For Thomas’ letters see “Der kuriale Geschäftsgang in den Briefen des Thomas von Capua,” *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, 13 (1935), 198–318. See as well S. F. Halm, *Collectio monumentorum veterum et recentium ineditorum*, 2 vols. (Brunswick, 1724–26), I, 279ff. Compare these with style of contemporary popes for whom he wrote letters: *Historia diplomatica*, II, 588–599 (Honorianus III); III, 224–226 and 289; and IV, 914–923 (Gregory IX). Schaller, “Die Kanzlei Kaiser Friedrichs II.,” pp. 279–280, contrasts the style of Innocent III with that of Honorius III, his successor. Fundamental to the life and work of Thomas of Capua is Hans Schaller, “Studien zur Briefsammlung des Kardinals Thomas von Capua,” *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 21 (1965), 371–518.

I am presently unable to express the difference between the rhetoric of harmony and that of conflict in the normal vocabulary of rhetoric. Whereas the first approach encompassed many styles, that of conflict was identical with the *stilus rhetoricus*. Both approaches were used in dealing with issues which orators normally would have dealt with in deliberative, judicial, and epideictic speeches but the various styles of the rhetoric of harmony were also used to treat any possible topic which could be put into a letter.
of Isernia contains frequent references to a number of classical authors from whom they borrow quotations and motifs.\textsuperscript{35} If later in his Bohemian exile Henry shows a marked preference for a more allegorical, obscure style of \textit{dictamen}, at the same time his writings continue to manifest an interest in the works of ancient authors.\textsuperscript{36}

Although the means by which contact was established remain unknown, Brunetto Latini, the most important Florentine thinker of the mid-thirteenth century, seems to have been influenced deeply by this southern group of writers.\textsuperscript{37} Latini's approach to rhetoric is vital for an understanding of \textit{ars dictaminis}, because more than any other author, he endeavors to describe in detail the nature and function of the letter. Although he exaggerates somewhat the extent to which most \textit{dictatores} assimilated the oration to the letter, Latini makes explicit the basic assumption common to all schools of \textit{ars dictaminis} that the teachings of ancient oratory serve as background for the compo-


\textsuperscript{36} See, for example, Emler, n. 2554 and n. 2570. Hampe, \textit{Beiträge zur Geschichte}, pp. 37–39, translates portions of Emler, n. 2567, and discusses the elaborate treatment of nature. Although he acknowledges the lack of detailed study of the diffusion of the works of the twelfth-century Alain de Lille in Italy, he cogently argues for the influence of Alain on Henry (pp. 35–37). Apart from Dante’s relationship to Alain (see E. R. Curtius, “Dante and Alanus ab Insulis, \textit{Romanische Forschungen}, 62 [1948], 28–31, with bibliography), the question of influences of this author on Italian \textit{dictatores} remains largely unexplored. If, however, elaborate use of allegory, a recondite vocabulary, and plays on words are signs of Alain’s inspiration, then the author’s popularity reached its height in Italy toward the middle part of the thirteenth century. Beginning with some of Boncompagno’s treatises (see above, n. 27) and della Vigna’s personal correspondence, these stylistic tendencies culminated in the exaggerations of writers like Henry of Isernia, Giordano da Terracina and Giovanni da Capua. An exchange of letters by the latter two is published by P. Sambin, \textit{Un certame dettatorio tra due notai pontifici} (1260). \textit{Lettere inedite di Giordano da Terracina e di Giovanni da Capua}, Note e discussioni erudite, 5 (Rome, 1955). The commentary of ‘Alanus’ on the \textit{Ad Herennium}, so heavily utilized by Bartolinus de Benincasa, does not appear to be the work of Alain de Lille. See Sandra Karaus Wertis, “The Commentary of Bartolinus de Benincasa de Canulo on the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium},” \textit{Viator}, 10 (1979), 290–291 and 300–301, n. 41.

sition of letters. In the process he reveals the tension between the more customary medieval rhetoric of harmony and the rhetoric of conflict espoused by the *stilus rhetoricus*. Furthermore, his writings show that the renewed interest in detailed study of ancient textbooks on oratory merely served to reinforce the *ars dictaminis* tradition generally.

Latini’s discussion of rhetoric and *ars dictaminis* occurs principally in two works, both written in France in the early 1260s, the *Rettorica* and the *Tresor*. The first is a translation into Tuscan with commentary of a portion of Cicero’s *De Inventione* while the second, written in French, is an encyclopedic work containing, in the third and last book, an extensive discussion of the nature of rhetoric and political science. He had no intention of being critical of current *dictamen* practices but rather was concerned with defining the place of *dictamen* in the larger field of rhetoric as defined by Cicero. His basic premise in both works is that Cicero’s instructions for composing orations also apply to letter writing. From Cicero he learned of the ancient debate on the scope of rhetoric. On the one hand, an ancient orator like Gorgias insisted that any subject could be treated rhetorically, while on the other, Aristotle, with whom Cicero agreed, maintained that there were only three kinds of orations: those dealing with demonstrative, deliberative, and judicial issues. Cicero further restricted the field of oratory by limiting it to controversies dealing with specific individuals and matters involving them. Latini endorses the position of Aristotle and Cicero without noting that traditionally *dictatores* had simply assumed that any subject could be treated in a letter. In Latini’s view the *dictator* can speak and write rhetorically only about controversial questions “where there is someone to oppose his

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By implication the stilus rhetoricus would seem to be the only style fitted to expressing one's position in the context of debate, but, as the analysis develops, it becomes clear that the author does not intend to favor any particular style. His concern is to give ars dictaminis a structure derived from ancient teachings.

To critics who maintain that there are many letters where no controversy is involved, Latini replies in the Rettorica that most letters contain one, if only implicitly, but if none can be found, then the subject of the letter is not suitable for rhetorical treatment. In this earlier work, however, Latini clearly has second thoughts. Acknowledging that letters of friendship often do not reflect even an implicit debate and being unwilling to exclude such an important form of letter from the scope of dictamen, he does a volte face. Insisting in the Rettorica that dictamen is a branch of rhetoric, he maintains at the same time, in contradiction to his initial position, that, unlike oratory, the letter is fitted to treat every subject and offers a definition of dictamen which would have been acceptable to any dictator: "Dictamen is a proper and ornate treatment of everything, appropriately applied to that thing." A letter, he continues a bit below, still trying to cover himself with Cicero's sanction, "must be furnished with attractive and pleasing words and full of good meaning, and also ornateness is demanded in every part of rhetoric as said above in the text of Cicero." Apparently the rhetoric of conflict and that of harmony are no longer contradictory but are viewed as different aspects of the same art. While some letters deal with conflict, others do not. In any case, he assures his reader that with help of his commentary on the De inventione he will be able to understand the art of composing both orations and letters. Mired in hopeless contradiction he breaks off the treatise.

In the discussion of ars dictaminis in the Tresor, Latini exhibits no such ambivalence when stipulating that only letters dealing with a controversial topic deserve rhetorical treatment. He says nothing of any category of letter not fitting this description but leaves the im-

40 Rett., pp. 39 and 98. The quotation is found on p. 46. Latini states his position in the Tresor, p. 322.
42 Ibid., p. 103.
43 Ibid., p. 104.
44 Tresor, p. 322.
pression that most correspondence meets the requirement of containing some controversial point, at least by implication. Obviously suppressing his doubts and guided by a deeply felt need to ground dictamen on ancient rhetorical teachings, Latini in the Tresor ruthlessly tries to make the letter conform to Cicero's criteria of controversy.

The impression left by both works is that like other dictatores Latini would not abandon the idea that the letter was analogous to the speech. What seemed at the start of writing the Rettorica an easy thing to illustrate became a mass of confusion. When unable to apply Cicero's requirement of controversy to letters of friendship, Latini simply abandoned that prescription, while claiming the rest of Cicero's rhetorical teachings for the ars dictaminis. Unwilling to make this concession in the Tresor, he discussed the letter and the speech as if there were no difference except that one was written and the other spoken. Whether devoted to the rhetoric of harmony or conflict, dictatores, Latini concluded, considered the letter formal in tone and tightly organized into clearly articulated segments like the oration. Beautifully adapted to public communication, such a conception thwarted expression of intimate thoughts and emotions.

Indeed, while the thirteenth century with the stilus rhetoricus might be considered the apogee in the development of the public letter, it represents a low point for the private letter. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the correspondence of Dante, the greatest proponent of the oratorical style in the generation after Latini. The Florentine poet's public letters, for instance, those directed to Florence, Henry VII, and the cardinals, are powerful, moving documents of his political passion. In contrast, those directed to personal acquaintances have none of those qualities of revealing intimacy which make such letters interesting and aesthetically attractive. In Dante's case, the weakness of these personal letters surely does not stem from shortcomings in his personality or talents but from the means of expression available to him.


46 Contrast public letters, Opere di Dante, pp. 400-406, and 408-411, with a private letter, ibid., pp. 411-412.
Latini’s efforts to interpret Cicero’s rhetorical teachings in the interest of contemporary needs mark the beginning of a new intensity of concern for both Ciceronian manuals in the schools of rhetoric themselves. Given the present state of scholarship, there is as yet no basis for connecting the De inventione commentary of Latini in the 1260s and that of Jacques de Dinant on the Ad Herennium in the same period with the rash of commentaries—especially on the pseudo-Ciceronian work—beginning around 1300.\(^47\) Perhaps as early as 1292 Giovanni di Bonandrea began his commentary on the Ad Herennium.\(^48\) His disciple, Bartolino di Benincasa, composed his own more famous one sometime after 1321.\(^49\) As for ars dictaminis, if the number of new manuals decreased significantly after 1290, the reason lies more in the amazing success of Bonandrea’s “best seller,” the Brevis introductio ad dictamen, than in any “classicizing” prejudice against dictamen.\(^50\) Indeed, the closer study of Cicero’s oratorical techniques and instruction to colores rhetorici characteristic of the commentaries only served to endorse the basic assumptions inherent in dictamen.

This close link between dictamen and oratory served in fact to retard the development of humanistic oratory until the late fourteenth century. Responsibility for the delay, however, must be shared by ars dictaminis with the ars predicandi, the closely allied art of composing sermons. The extant orations of Petrarch himself reflect his loyalty to the teachings of the latter, while of the two surviving orations of Sa-


lutati, one is obviously built on the lines of the sermon while the other follows the precepts of *dictamen*. Humanistic oratory must await the third generation when Pier Paolo Vergerio becomes perhaps the first to break with medieval precedent. Consequently, at least until the last decade of the fourteenth century oratory formally remained almost impervious to humanistic teachings.

Contemporary with the growing interest in the ancient rhetorical tracts in the later thirteenth century was the rise of so-called protohumanism. Whereas Latini sought to make ancient literature useful to his society by providing translations and discussing ancient authors in the vernacular, a small group of Northern and Central Italian authors beginning in the next generation devoted themselves to the

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Only two orations of Salutati are extant: Ronald G. Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads. Life, Works and Thought of Coluccio Salutati* (Durham, N. C., 1983), Appendix I. The *Sermo Colucii Pyerii de Stignano, Cancellarii Florentini habitus . . . ad Phylippum de Alenconio* (B.A.V., Capp. 147, pp. 35–37) and the *Oratoribus Regis Francorum. Responsio facta per dominum Colucium pro parte Colligatorum et Communis Florentie*, ibid., pp. 7–8 and 400–402, are both unedited. Salutati appropriately employs elements of the *ars praedicandi* when speaking before Alençon, a cardinal, while for the ambassadors he resorts to the secular oratory of *ars arengandi*.

On secular oratory in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see the important pages of Kristeller, "Rhetoric and Philosophy," pp. 237–238, and notes. For the *ars praedicandi*, see Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 310ff.

52 I have benefited greatly from reading the unpublished essay of John M. McManamon, "Innovation in Early Humanist Rhetoric: The Oratory of Pier Paolo Vergerio (the Elder)."
study and imitation of ancient Latin literature. Generally they demonstrated a new concern for understanding ancient metric, appreciating ancient literature through commenting on texts, and organizing Latin literary history by establishing correct attributions. They composed poetry and wrote history in clear dependency on ancient Roman models.53

The chronology of events is still difficult to define with precision, but at least by 1280 in Padua Lovato Lovati had begun his composition of poetry in the classical mode, and by his death in 1309 he had composed, among other things, a commentary on the city of Padua and the struggle between Guelfs and Ghibellines, a commentary on the metric of Seneca's tragedies, and numerous Latin poems.54 Both at Padua and elsewhere by the turn of the century literally dozens of scholars were engaged in similar pursuits. While some of these men were dictatores, professional teachers of rhetoric or chancery officials, the literary interests of all of these scholars, nonetheless, developed in the private, not the public side of their careers.55


54 On Paduan proto-humanism see Guido Billanovich, "Il preumanesimo padovano," in Storia della cultura veneta, 1 (Vicenza, 1976), pp. 19-110, with its rich bibliography. On the Paduan circle and its relationship with other contemporary groups with classical interests, consult Rino Avesani, "Il preumanesimo veronese"; Luciano Gargan, "Il preumanesimo a Vicenza, Treviso e Venezia"; and Girolamo Arnaldi-Lidia Capo, "I cronisti di Venezia e della Marca Trevigiana," in the same volume, pp. 111, 142-146, 276-285 respectively, but see "Indici" of this rich volume for other references. Also see Nancy G. Siraisi, Arts and Sciences at Padua: The 'Studium' of Padua before 1350 (Toronto, 1973), pp. 43-45. John Hyde, Padua in the Age of Dante (Manchester and New York, 1966), provides an excellent description of the society in which the Paduan scholars lived and wrote. On the intellectual life of the city see in addition to Hyde and Siraisi the early chapters of R.G.G. Mercer, The Teaching of Gasparino Barzizza with Special Reference to his Place in Paduan Humanism, MHRA Texts and Dissertations, 10 (London, 1979). For editions and secondary treatments see Billanovich, "Il preumanesimo padovano," pp. 155-181; and Siraisi, Arts and Sciences, pp. 45-49.

55 Both Lovato and Mussato were notaries and judges by profession: see definition of functions of judge, Hyde, Padua, pp. 122-126. Neither was a dictator according to Prof. Kristeller's definition of a dictator as a medieval rhetorician who either served as a secretary for a prince or city or a teacher of grammar and rhetoric. On the other hand, Giovanni del Virgilio and Geri d'Arezzo were dictatores. For bibliography on Giovanni del Virgilio see Giuseppe Billanovich, "Giovanni del Virgilio, Pietro da Moglio, Francesco da Fiano," Italia medioevale e umanistica, 6 (1963), 260; and especially Paul O. Kristeller, "Un 'Ars dictaminis' di Giovanni del Virgilio," Italia medioevale e umanistica, 4 (1961), 181-200. On Geri see below, n. 68.
The proto-humanist movement appears to have been intimately related to developments in subjects generally assigned in the medieval program of studies to grammar. Like his ancient counterpart, the grammarian of the Middle Ages dealt with the grammar of the language and analyzed great literary masterpieces. While in antiquity the primary focus of the grammarians was poetic literature and the rhetoricians studied mostly prose, the medieval grammarians monopolized the teaching of both. Textual analysis involved among other things discussing the biography of the author, the historical and mythological references found in the work and the various figures used, as well as subjecting the text's vocabulary to etymological study to bring out the hidden truths.


57 More strongly than older scholars like Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation*, p. 374, Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*, pp. 218-219, suggests that ancient grammarians may have used prose works to provide students with initial exercises in composition, but he concedes that they did not indulge in the detailed analysis they did for poetry. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion*, p. 269, acknowledges some overlap but considers the study of poets to have belonged principally to the school of grammar and that of the prose writers to the school of rhetoric.

On the medieval grammarian's responsibility for studying prose writings and composition in prose see Ghellinck, *L'essor*, II, 86-87; and Philippe Delhaye, "'Grammatica' et 'Ethica' au XIIe siècle," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 25 (1958), 67-69. Ernst Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 48-52, provides a detailed list of the range of the curriculum. John of Salisbury demonstrates in his *Metalogicon*, ed. Clement C. J. Webb (Oxford, 1928) the extent to which the conception of trivium in the mind of this major twelfth-century scholar has been modified. Rhetoric has been absorbed by grammar or largely identified with dialectic (I, 20, pp. 48-49, and II, 3, pp. 64-65). On the assimilation of rhetoric to dialectic see Richard McKeon, "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 17 (1942), 15-18. Although he does not mention the relationship of grammar to rhetoric in twelfth-century Northern Europe just referred to, McKeon points out tendencies for theology to absorb rhetoric (pp. 19-22) and—beginning in eleventh-century Italy—for *ars dictaminis* to become equivalent to rhetoric (pp. 26-29). See below, p. 25. Incidentally, John of Salisbury does not see dialectic as the enemy of grammar but rather for him both are allied against the Cornificians, who ignore learned tradition in the name of a shallow dialectic which renders its adherents disputatious.

58 For the ancient technique see Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation*, pp. 375-378; and Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*, pp. 219ff. John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, describes the technique for teaching grammar characteristic of the so-called School of Chartres in the twelfth century. See as well E. A. Quain, "The Medieval Accessus ad auctores," *Tra-
cient precedent for the medieval grammarian’s emphasis on the ethical implications of the reading material, part of the motivation lay in his desire to justify devoting so much of the classroom time to reading pagan authors.59

Within the program of studies as developed by the Carolingians and the great northern educators of the first three quarters of the twelfth century, grammar tended to absorb rhetoric. However, to the South in Italy the development of *ars dictaminis* from the very late eleventh century established a different trend which would also affect the North by the second half of the twelfth century. For in Italy in this period rhetoric reemerged as an independent discipline, as in ancient times, but one limited to a relatively narrow reading program.60 The main concern of the rhetorician was to teach the rules of *ars dictaminis* and to help students to master the techniques in their own


60 Rhetoric from the twelfth century becomes almost synonymous with *dictamen*. See Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 76; and Kristeller, “Renaissance Philosophy and the Medieval Tradition,” p. 114; and “Philosophy and Rhetoric,” p. 241. The *Brevarium de dictamine* of the late eleventh-century Alberico of Montecassino (ed. Ludwig Rockinger, *Briefsteller*, I) marks the point at which *dictamen* is separated from the broader spectrum of the liberal arts, which he treats in his other works. His twelfth-century successors are specialists. See Kristeller, “Rhetoric and Philosophy,” pp. 233–234. The production of *dictamen* treatises by French writers begins in the mid-1150s (Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 227) and by the end of the century rhetoric proper in France too seems to become identical with *ars dictaminis*. Rhetoric, as represented in the Parisian army by Henri d’Andeli in his famous poem (L. J. Paetow, *The Battle of the Seven Arts: A French Poem by Henri d’Andeli, Trouvère of the Thirteenth Century*, Memoirs of the University of California, vol. 4, No. 1 [Berkeley, 1914]), verses 224 and 364–365 (pp. 51 and 57), is equivalent to *ars dictaminis*. See Philippe Delhaye, “La place des arts libéraux et programmes scolaires au xiiie siècle,” in *Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge*, p. 165. In the North, however, two other tendencies are operating, one assimilating rhetoric to dialectic and the other incorporating it into theology. See Richard McKeon, “Rhetoric in the Middle Ages,” pp. 25–26.
writing. Even by the early fourteenth century, when rhetoricians were beginning to give detailed commentaries on ancient handbooks of rhetoric, analysis of ancient prose masterpieces still played no role in the curriculum of the school of rhetoric. Giovanni di Bonandrea and Bartolino di Benincasa, leading teachers of rhetoric in Bologna, spent half the year lecturing on a manual of *ars dictaminis* and the other half on the *Ad Herennium*.

The evolution of rhetoric was closely allied with developments in the notarial art. By the end of the eleventh century it became obvious that the notarial formulas utilized by previous generations no longer fit an increasingly sophisticated society experiencing rapid economic growth. Students had to be trained not only to manipulate an ever increasing arsenal of formulas but also to exploit the literary possibilities offered by the legal document. The close alliance between rhetoric and the notarial art brought into being the *dictator*, who either taught the techniques of writing prose or, himself the product of such a discipline, had a career as a chancery official where he utilized those skills. Although in the thirteenth century the increasing complexity of the notarial art caused it to break off as a separate course of instruction, the *ars dictaminis* and the *ars notarie* were never completely independent one from the other.

The tendency in Italy from the early twelfth century to define rhetoric as *ars dictaminis* had serious consequences for grammar instruction. The same individual might teach both rhetoric and grammar as before but now, in a school program where the student aimed

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61 Wertis, “The Commentary of Bartolinus de Benincasa,” pp. 286–288, publishes the terms of Bartolinus’ employment and it can be assumed that those for his teacher and predecessor, Bonandrea, were similar.

62 An interesting example of the evolution of formulas in the twelfth century is provided by Gianfranco Orlandelli, “Genesi dell’ *ars notarie* nel secolo xiii,” *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser., 6, no. 2 (1965), 346–347. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 264–265, discusses the link with dictamen. Alberico’s *De dictamine*, Briefsteller, I, 33–40, included a discussion of a document within his treatment of dictamen generally.

63 The creation of a separate manual for the *ars notarie* was a product of the thirteenth century. See Orlandelli, “Genesi dell’ *ars notarie*,” pp. 329–330. I do not agree with Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 263–268, who stresses the rivalry between the *ars notarie* and *ars dictaminis* in the thirteenth century. For the close relationship between the two disciplines even in this century see, Wieruszowski, “*Ars dictaminis* in the Time of Dante,” *Politics and Culture*, p. 363, n. 1. Also see n. 64 below. On the culture of the notary the best work remains F. Novati, “*Il notaiolo nella vita e nella letteratura italiana delle origini*,” *Freschi e Minii del Duecento* (Rome, 1925), pp. 241–264.
at perfecting a prose style largely divorced from classical precedents, the emphasis in teaching grammar fell on providing instruction more in the mechanics of the language than in ancient literature, which had little significance for contemporary tastes in writing. Against this background proto-humanism appears as the reaction of grammar to such a restricted existence.

The proto-humanists from Lovato on reinvigorated grammatical studies, and the various areas in which they themselves did creative work demonstrate their orientation. Members of the movement produced hundreds of poems imitating ancient examples and at least one play, the Ecerinis, based on Seneca’s tragedies. Although many of the poems took the form of epistles, there is—with one notable exception to be discussed—an absence of surviving prose letters and orations by these men. How is this to be explained? The obvious effort of the group in their historical works to imitate ancient Latin writers indicates their willingness to reform prose style. Nor can there be any doubt that they wrote speeches and prose letters. The most probable conclusion is that whereas they felt able to reform poetry and even historical writing, they could not challenge the domination of ars dictaminis in these other areas. Men with a new kind of taste, they wrote letters and composed orations in the traditional fashion, but, taking no pride in them, they left the survival of these works more or less to chance. While reform of oratory must await the third generation of Italian humanists, reform in writing letters, that is, personal correspondence, constitutes one of the major elements of Petrarchan humanism.

Close study of the surviving correspondence of writers like Seneca and Pliny doubtless made the proto-humanists aware of major differ-

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65 The text of Mussato’s play is found Ecerinide, ed. Luigi Padrin (Bologna, 1900).
66 This exception is the correspondence of Geri d’Arezzo. If one wishes to include Dante among the proto-humanists, then the nature of his correspondence confirms that dictamen had a strong hold on the epistolary style of this group. Mussato’s imitation of ancient style in his historical writings is described by Antonio Zardo, Albertino Mussato. Studio storico e letterario (Padua, 1884), pp. 256ff. His treatment involves a comparison between the style of Mussato and that of Ferreto dei Ferreti. Compare Manlio Dazzi, “Il Mussato storico,” Archivio veneto, 5th ser., 6 (1929), 386–388. Cf. G. Billanovich, “Il preumanesimo padovano,” pp. 83–84.
ences between ancient epistolary style and their own. At least this seems to be implied by the proto-humanist Giovanni del Virgilio in his unfinished manual of *ars dictaminis* for a course of rhetoric. Otherwise unexceptional in its presentation of the art, the manual in one of its early paragraphs divides *dictamen* into four species: *metricum*, *ritimicum*, *prosaicum*, and *permistum*. He further divides *dictamen prosaicum* into a subspecies he terms *epistolare* and another called *non epistolare*. The former is itself subdivided into two modes: the one identified as the ancient mode, "with mixing of the parts of the letter and with the *cursus* omitted, wherein only the continuity in expression of ideas is maintained, as in the letters of Seneca, Paul and the like"; the other, "in the modern mode, following the distinction of parts and the elegance of the *cursus*, as in the letters of Pietro de la Vigna and others."67

Among the proto-humanists, however, one scholar, like Giovanni also a *dictator*, apparently rebelled against the modern practice. Little is known of Geri d'Arezzo or of the influences affecting his work, but he clearly had the courage to choose between the ancient and modern approach to letters. Of his once voluminous correspondence, only six short personal letters survive.68 But these are sufficient to show that Geri is resolved to develop a new stylistic approach to writing such letters. He refuses to follow the prescribed five-part letter form strictly; the violations of the *cursus* are frequent enough to suggest that they are intentional; the tone desired, if not completely realized, is one of informality. His letters emulate conversation, not speeches.

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67 Kristeller, "Un' *Ars dictaminis*," p. 194.
68 Roberto Weiss, "Geri d'Arezzo," in *Il primo secolo*, pp. 53–66 and 105–32. The prose letters are found on pp. 109–115, 120–125, and 133. In contrast with the first five, the sixth letter reflects Geri's skill at composing in *dictamen*. However, Weiss, p. 63, seems to exaggerate when he characterizes all the six letters as closely connected with *dictamen*: "Lo stile . . mostra ancora l'influenza dei precetti delle scuole di *dictamen*, precetti che furono seguiti anche da Dante. Geri si svincola tuttavia da questa tradizione più che non facesse Dante, grazie alle sue vaste conoscenze di testi classici, che gli permettono di apoggiarsi frequentemente a modelli antichi, e anche grazie alla sua indipendenza dalla scolastica, che gli rende possibile l'esprimere concetti che appartengono all'età dell'umanesimo piuttosto che al tardo medioevo." Helene Wieruszowski, "Arezzo as a Center of Learning and Letters in the Thirteenth Century," in *Politics and Culture*, p. 461, agrees with Weiss. However, in my view the "private" character of the rhetoric of the first five letters marks them as constituting an important break with the past. Salutati realized the importance of Geri's role in the dawn of humanism when he named him as an imitator of Pliny. See Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario*, ed. Francesco Novati, Fonti per la storia d'Italia, vols. 15–18 (Rome, 1891–1911), III, 84.
Geri obviously wished to substitute a new model for the old ones associated with *ars dictaminis*. Educated presumably in Arezzo in the last decades of the thirteenth century, he would have been a student in the commune's schools in the period of Arezzo’s cultural brilliance.⁶⁹ Geri studied the letters of Seneca and Pliny closely, either at Arezzo or later when a student at Bologna, and his style is marked by the contact. Geri’s surviving correspondence betrays frequent plagiarisms from Pliny’s epistolary collection. His letter on the death of the Duke of Calabria of 1329 reveals the author’s desire to imitate an ancient letter in its details.⁷⁰

Geri’s advance was hesitant. Hesitancy, however, was not Petrarch’s problem after 1345 when Cicero revealed to him the potentialities for expression available in the personal letter. That encounter caused him to reread Cicero in an effort to ferret out the great writer’s fragmentary references to epistolography. Not Cicero the teacher of rhetoric, but Cicero the letter writer gave Petrarch means by which he could utter his inmost thoughts and give form to the sinuosities of his personality for the benefit of the learned men of his generation.

Petrarch’s letter of dedication of his *Familiares* addressed to Ludwig von Kempen provides an unsystematic discussion of Petrarch’s stylistic approach to the private letter.⁷¹ In writing such letters, Petrarch insists he would not use “great power of speech” if he had it. Even Cicero, who doubtless possessed immense oratorical gifts, did not display them in such cases. Rather, in his letters and, where appropriate, in his books Cicero employed “an ‘equable’ style” and “‘a temperate type of speech.’”⁷² In his own case, involved neither in politics nor lawsuits, he has no need for such eloquence and, at

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⁶⁹ Weiss, “Geri d’Arezzo,” p. 57. Wieruszowski, “Arezzo as a Center of Learning,” pp. 412–418, maintains that the school continued to flourish in the last part of the thirteenth century.

⁷⁰ See Weiss’s notes to the letters. The letter to Bernardo d’Aquino is modelled on Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 63 (ibid., p. 125).


⁷² *Le familiari*, I, 6: “Omissa illa igitur oratoria dicendi vi, qua nec egeo nec abundo et quam, si exuberet, ubi exerceram non habeo, hoc mediocre domesticum et familiare
any rate, his ability is untried. "Therefore," Petrarch concludes, "you will enjoy, as you have my other writings, this plain, domestic and friendly style, forgetting that rhetorical power of speech which I neither lack nor abound in and which, if I did abound in, I would not know where to exercise. And as a faithful follower you will find words that we use in ordinary speech proper and suitable for expressing my ideas."

At one point he seems to be apologizing for the unevenness of his letter collection. Variety of subject is partially responsible but, even more determining, is the identity of the recipient. By this he means not the social or official standing of the addresses but his personal situation:

The strong man must be addressed in one way, the spiritless one in another, the young and inexperienced one in still another, the old man who has discharged his life’s duties in another, and in still another manner the person puffed up with good fortune, the victim of adversity in another, and finally in yet another manner must be addressed the man of letters renowned for his talents, and the ignoramus who would not understand anything you said if you spoke in even a slightly polished fashion. Infinite are the differences between men nor are their minds any more alike than the shapes of their foreheads.

As opposed to the dictatores, Petrarch allowed his style to be governed largely by the personal qualities of his correspondents rather than the place the recipients occupied on the political or social ladder. However, besides tailoring the letter to one’s feel for the recipient’s personality, the author must consider the reader’s frame of mind when reading it.

dicendi genus amice leges, ut reliqua, et boni consules, his quibus in comuni sermone utimur, aptum accomadatumque sententiis.” Just before this he writes, quoting from the De officiis, I. 1.3: “Vis enim maior in illis dicendi, sed hoc quoque colendum est aequabile et temperatum orationis genus.” Clearly Petrarch, following Cicero, is rejecting the stilus sublimis, the most elaborate of the traditional three genera dicendi, as appropriate for personal letters.
Reaffirming that he intended to write in a friendly manner (*familiariiter*) to his friends, Petrarch promises to offer in the pages that follow a series of letters dealing with all sorts of subjects but one which in a sense does “almost nothing more than to speak about my state of mind or any other matter of interest which I thought my friends would like to know.” For Cicero the task of the private letter was the same: “to make the recipient more informed about those things he does not know.” Thus, Ludwig will find few masterpieces in the collection but many written in a rather simple and unstudied manner about personal affairs. Like Cicero, he has, where appropriate, made ethical observations.

Petrarch’s conception of the personal letter as a conversation was perhaps totally inspired by his discovery of the *Ad Atticum* in the library of the cathedral chapter in Verona in 1345. From his encounter with the lively, gossipy, revealing letters of the great Roman so very different in nature from the medieval tradition of letter writing, he emerged disappointed with the inconsistent character of his hero but resolved to create a collection of his own. His first effort, written immediately following the discovery, was a letter to Cicero in which he upbraided the dead man for his conduct. Significantly, Petrarch’s new approach to the letter derived inspiration from Cicero’s actual correspondence, and only after appreciating the style did he understand Cicero’s remark in the *De officiis*, I, 1.3, cited in the dedicatory letter.

Over the next fifteen years Petrarch not only fabricated a number of letters purporting to have been written earlier in his life, but he also reworked those of which he had retained a copy. Had the originals of these letters actually sent before 1345 survived, they presumed by a quality.” By this term he meant to recognize men who had achieved distinction through their personal skills and knowledge. However, in contrast with Petrarch, who tailored his letters to the individual, Giovanni was still obviously thinking in terms of social categories. More significant for our purposes is Banker’s reference to Giovanni’s molding of the *exordium* to fit “the orator’s or writer’s case and the psychological state of the listeners.” This certainly constituted a first step in the direction taken by Petrarch.

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77 *Le familiari*, I, 11.
79 For bibliography, dating, and discussion of this first letter to Cicero, see references in Wilkins’ *Petrarch’s Correspondence*, p. 88, and the references especially in Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, pp. 28–29.
ably would have been more consonant with the medieval tradition than those actually in the present collection. As it was, the Familiares, shaped after 1345, demonstrated to the contemporary learned world a novel yet ancient conception of the private letter and inaugurated a new epoch in the history of epistolography in Western Europe.

Geri d’Arezzo had pioneered stylistic reform in his personal correspondence, but Petrarch far surpassed him. A major factor influencing the latter was that he was not a dictator by profession, but a private man. Even when he spoke on issues of public life, he spoke with a certain detachment from political partisanship, a freedom not enjoyed by the chancery official or the professional teacher. While Boccaccio’s more precarious financial situation made him vulnerable to pressures of earning a living, his literary interests, like those of Petrarch, were overwhelmingly those of the private individual.

Billanovich, *ibid.*, pp. 3–55, was the first to indicate a large number of fictitious letters in the early books of the collection. Bernardo, *Rerum familiarum*, p. xxxi, identifies others and adds that “a good portion” of the first eight books “were fictitious letters.” Because no autographs of letters before the Cicero discovery survive, the extent to which Petrarch reworked letters actually dispatched cannot be known. The manner of directly addressing his classical friends, however, was not the product of the discovery of the *Ad Atticum*. Already in the *Rerum memorandarum libri* he had followed that practice. See, for example, Billanovich’s edition in Edizione nazionale delle opere di Francesco Petrarca, 5, pt. 1 (Rome, 1943), Bks. I, 14; IV, 22–23; and 29. For dating the whole text of this work before February, 1345, see *ibid.*, pp. lxxii–xcv. Petrarch is also striving to establish the *sermo familiaris* in his *Collatio laureationis* of 1341. See above n. 51. If his correspondence is considered as a whole, it proves, however, to be far closer to Seneca’s epistles both in style and content than to Cicero’s. For the letters of the two ancient authors see Thraede, *Grundzüge*, pp. 27–47 and 65–74. The importance of the *Ad Atticum*, however, was that the extraordinary conversational quality of the style had a “shock” value for Petrarch.

A civil lawyer, Geri served as *avocatus comunis* Florentie in 1326 and 1327, but apart from this appointment his professional career remains unknown. See Weiss, “Geri d’Arezzo”, p. 105. Kristeller does not count either Petrarch or Boccaccio as a dictator (see above, pp. 2–3).

vation of a personal mode of expression accorded naturally with this status.

The life largely free of financial concerns or political involvement was conducive to the kind of humanistic endeavor Petrarch pursued. His search for manuscripts, his concern for collating texts, establishing facts of literary history, and reforming language are marks of a humanism essentially grammatical and philological in character. His approach to history as teaching by example as well as his general focus on the relationship between ethics and learning were traditional in the schools of grammar. In his case, however, the ethical orientation of scholarship was clarified and enhanced by an intensive reading of Cicero. Furthermore, as a private man he attained a degree of integration of this early grammatical humanism with his style of life which was denied the proto-humanists, who had to lead public lives as professional rhetoricians.

Although he attempted to apply his familiar style to oratory, as noted above, he took no risk with official or business letters. Correspondence between princes and city-states, which offered a wide field for displaying one's eloquence, remained largely untouched by the new style. Petrarch himself occasionally demonstrated his ability to compose in the medieval style when called upon to write a public letter on behalf of a government.83 Among Petrarch's immediate followers Coluccio Salutati devoted much of his time to writing this official kind of letter.84 In fact, down to the late fifteenth century, after more than a hundred years of humanistic letter writing, public letters remained the preserve of a conception of letter writing that evolved in the centuries before Petrarch's birth.85

humanist because of his concern with literature. Even if the influence of Boncompagno on Boccaccio's narrative technique could be proven, the author must first show that Boccaccio's technique itself was "humanistic."

83 For Petrarch's public letters see, for example, Variae, vi, lix and lxiii in Epistolae de rebus familiaribus et variae, ed. G. Fracassetti, 3 vols. (Florence, 1859-1863), III, 317-319, 469-471, and 477-479.

84 On Salutati's public letters, see Ronald Witt, Coluccio Salutati. His public letters, while basically reflecting the rules of dictamen, have humanistic aspects (ibid., pp. 38-40). Also see the discussion of the letters by Daniela De Rosa, Coluccio Salutati: Il cancelliere e il pensatore politico, Biblioteca di storia, 28 (Florence, 1980), pp. 13ff.

85 Witt, Coluccio Salutati, p. 41. Bartolomeo Scala in the late fifteenth century attempted to introduce reforms in the public letters while chancellor of Florence. See Paul O. Kristeller, "An Unknown Correspondence of Alessandro Braccesi," in Classical Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman, Storia e lettera-
As the fifteenth century progressed, official letters sent in the name of a ruling authority increasingly lost importance as a means of carrying on diplomatic relations and political propaganda. There were more embassies, while letters and tracts composed by humanists in their own name and written in humanistic Latin became the major vehicle for propaganda. However, despite decreasing practical importance, official Latin epistolography in the fifteenth century remained strongly tied to the teaching of the dictatores of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Singling out the personal letter for special treatment as Petrarch had done, was to be a long-standing practice among the humanists, who, like Petrarch, conceded the advantages of ars dictaminis in other areas of epistolography.

No one reading Petrarch’s correspondence or his other writings could of course consider his letters uninformed by the teachings of classical rhetoric. The creation of the “domestic” style, a stilus humilis, surely demanded a deep knowledge of the art and a superb gift for sensing appropriateness of style. His writings reflect an expanded understanding of the functions and complex character of rhetoric. Nevertheless, in at least three respects he is anti-rhetorical. He rejected the practice of contemporary rhetoric of treating all letters oratorically. Moreover, a subjective element pervading his thought tended to undercut the rhetorician’s aim of moving the audience toward a specific end. Finally, his breadth of interests and the depth to which he pursued them testify to his rejection of the narrow technical approach to rhetoric prevailing among the dictatores. He would readily agree with the Cicero of the De oratore, who criticized his juvenile De inventione by condemning the “exponents of the science of rhetoric” who “only write about the classification of cases and the elementary rules and the methods of stating the facts.” Rather the orator’s “eloquence is so potent a force that it embraces the origins and operation and developments of all things, all the virtues and duties, all the natural principles governing the morals and minds and life of mankind, and also determines their customs and laws and rights, and controls the


86 Witt, Coluccio Salutati, pp. 21–22 and 40–41.
government of the state, and expresses everything that concerns whatever topic in a graceful and flowing style."  

While Petrarch considered himself an orator—not a rhetorician—according to his understanding of Cicero’s definition, his desire for the private life and his central concerns were in fact more those of the poet and literary scholar. The same thing was true for Boccaccio. The movement they initiated grew directly out of a medieval grammatical tradition whose previous high point had been the twelfth-century French humanists. Short of applying one’s learning and eloquence to the needs of the state as a citizen or, better still, through some official charge, Cicero’s ideal of the orator was unattainable. As articulated by Cicero and before him by Greek writers going back to Isocrates, the full potential in the ideal could be realized only within a republican setting. Even Coluccio Salutati, for thirty-one years chancellor of the Florentine Republic, achieved only an uneasy reconciliation between the demands of grammatical-philological humanism and his commitment to Florence as a citizen-patriot.

With Vergerio’s generation at the close of the fourteenth century humanism began to affect oratory stylistically and to overcome another stronghold of *ars dictaminis*. Once humanism dominated the schools of rhetoric and the chanceries of Italy, scholarly and literary concerns became welded to professional commitment, and the age of rhetorical humanism began. Kristeller’s view of the majority of humanists is certainly accurate for this century. While they by no means neglected the other *studia humanitatis*, most humanists earned their livelihood by their knowledge of classical rhetorical models and their skill in knowing when and how to use them.

I would, however, make one modification in defining the fifteenth-century humanists as rhetoricians. For the most part, the advent of humanism in the domain of rhetoric proper merely encouraged the replacement in schools and chanceries of one group of

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88 The contrast between the concerns and interests of the grammarian with those of the rhetorician in the Renaissance is brilliantly developed by John O’Malley in his "Grammar and Rhetoric in the Spirituality of Erasmus," to be published in *Paideia*. This conflict could also be conceived in terms of the conflict between poet and orator. See O. B. Hardison, “The Orator and the Poet: the Dilemma of Humanist Literature,” *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1 (1971), 33–44.
technicians, the *dictatores*, by another, the humanists, who, more skillful, were capable of using both humanistic and traditional styles as the need arose. The appropriation of oratory by humanism, nevertheless, facilitated a more significant and related development: that is, the realization of Cicero’s ideal of the orator. It was not coincidental that Leonardo Bruni made his first statement of a consistent republican view of politics and history in the form of an oration in 1403/4.

Like other humanists, Bruni devoted himself to wide study of *studia humanitatis*, but with exceptional single-mindedness he subordinated the grammatical and philological aspects of humanism to the tasks of the orator. Deriving the definition from the ancient tradition, Bruni presented the orator as devoting his life to serving and preserving a society of free men through his learning and eloquence. Whereas Petrarch established the personal voice to express a new cluster of ideas and emotions centered on subjective experience, two generations later Bruni discovered the voice of the citizen and through it communicated his interpretation of the historic struggle of freedom and liberty in human society and of the role of political participation in the development of the complete individual.\(^8^9\)

\(^8^9\) Bruni’s civic humanism has been defined and analyzed by Hans Baron in a variety of works but most notably in his *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Princeton, 1966). Among others, Florentine humanists like Poggio and Palmieri deserve the title of orator for their achievements.