UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN

INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES MÉDIÉVALES

Redingenstraat, 16

3000-LOUVAIN (Belgique)

Secrétaire
Robert BULTOT

Président
Léopold GENICOT

TYPOLOGIE DES SOURCES
DU MOYEN ÂGE OCCIDENTAL

DIRECTEUR : L. GENICOT

——————————— Fasc. 17 ———————————

A-II

LETTERS AND
LETTER-COLLECTIONS

BY

GILES CONSTABLE

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The serious study of letters and letter-collections as a type of historical source is one of the least developed branches of medieval historiography [1]. Aside from the pioneering studies of Wattenbach and Valois, and a few works on formularies, almost no work of lasting value appeared in the nineteenth century, and it was not until the second quarter of the present century that attention was drawn, above all by scholars working in Germany, to the need for a comprehensive history and examination of medieval letters — 'a "Wattenbach" for letter-collections', as Erdmann called it [2] — and for new editions of almost all the post-Carolingian collections, made in the light of a comparative knowledge of how letters were written and collections put together. 'Research in this area is still in its infancy', wrote Erdmann in 1930, 'and most of the work remains to be done' [3]. Ten years later Pivec said that medieval *Briefwissenschaft*, 'although less developed than its sister-discipline diplomatic, has at least established its independence among the historical *Hilfswissenschaften*'; but after the War De Ghellinck still remarked that the study of medieval letter-collections had hardly begun [4]. And no more than a handful of general studies have appeared in the last generation.

The present bibliography is therefore relatively short, even with the addition of a few works on letter-writing in Antiquity, which has been more systematically studied. It needs to be supplemented, however, by the studies and editions of individual letters and letter-collections,

---

[1] Cf. especially the works of Schmeidler and H. Leclercq cited below; also A. DE BOÜARD, *Manuel de diplomatique française et pontificale*, I : *Diplomatique générale*. Paris, 1929, p. 33, where he said (n. 3) concerning letters : 'Or, il se trouve cette importante classe de documents, délaissée par les diplomatistes comme ressortissant surtout à la méthode critique propre aux sources narratives, mais qui prête... à une critique diplomatique largement entendue — il s'agirait, non de déterminer les règles, comme on fait pour les actes, mais des usages; non de poser des principes de critique formelle, mais de reconnaître l'évolution d'un genre littéraire — n'a jamais fait l'objet de pareilles recherches. C'est une lacune à combler'.

[2] C. ERDMANN, *Die Briefe Meinhards von Bamberg*, in *Neues Archiv*, 49 (1930-32), p. 385.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 387. Cf. ERDMANN, *Briefliteratur*, foreword and p. 1.

[4] PIVEC, *Stil- und Sprachentwicklung*, p. 36; J. DE GHELLINCK, *L'essor de la littérature latine au XIIe siècle*. Vol. 1, Brussels, 1946. (Museum Lessianum. Section historique, 4), p. 112.

many of which include material of general significance [5]. A recent and convenient guide to works on the formal art of letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*) will be found in J. J. MURPHY, *Medieval Rhetoric : A Select Bibliography*. Toronto, 1971. (Toronto Medieval Bibliographies, 3), p. 55-70, whose references will not be repeated here.

1. ANCIENT EPISTOLOGRAPHY

DOTY, W. G., *The Classification of Epistolary Literature*, in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 31 (1969), p. 183-199.

EXLER, F. X. J., *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter : A Study in Greek Epistolography*. Washington, D.C., 1923.

KOSKENNIEMI, H., *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* Helsinki, 1956. (Annales Academiae scientiarum Fennicae, B, 102[2]).

PETER, H., *Der Brief in der römischen Litteratur*. Leipzig, 1901. (Abhandlungen der philologisch-historische Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 20[3]).

ROLLER, O., *Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe : Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom antiken Briefe*. Stuttgart, 1933. (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom alten und neuen Testament, 58, 4 S. 6).

SYKUTRIS, J., *Epistolographie*, in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Supplementband 5 (1931), col. 185-220.

THRAEDE, K., *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik*. Munich, 1970. (Zetemata, 48).

VAN DEN HOUT, M., *Studies in Early Greek Letter-Writing*, in *Mnemosyne*, 4 S., 2 (1949), p. 19-41, 138-153.

2. MEDIEVAL EPISTOLOGRAPHY

BÜTOW, A., *Die Entwicklung der mittelalterlichen Briefsteller bis zur Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Theorieen der ars dictandi*. Greifswald, 1908.

ERDMANN, C., *Studien zur Briefliteratur Deutschlands im elften Jahr-*

---

[5] Many of these are cited in the notes below, but no effort has been made here to give a comprehensive list. For eleventh- and twelfth-century collections, and some general questions of epistolography, full references will be found in the introduction to my edition of *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*. Cambridge (Mass.), 1967. (Harvard Historical Studies, 78), 2 vol.

hundert. Leipzig, 1938. (Schriften des Reichsinstitut für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde, 1).

HOFFMANN, H., *Zur mittelalterlichen Brieftechnik*, in *Spiegel der Geschichte : Festgabe für Max Braubach*. Münster, 1964, p. 141-170.

KARLSSON, G., *Idéologie et cérémonial dans l'épistolographie byzantine*. 2nd ed. Uppsala, 1962. (Acta universitatis Upsaliensis : Studia graeca Upsaliensia, 3).

LECLERCQ, H., *Lettres chrétiennes*, in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*. VIIIe part., vol. 2 (1929), col. 2683-2885.

LECLERCQ, J., *Le genre épistolaire au moyen âge*, in *Revue du moyen âge latin*, 2 (1946), p. 63-70.

MARTI, M., *L'epistolario come 'genere' e un problema editoriale*, in *Studi e problemi di critica testuale : Convegno di Studi di filologia italiana nel centenario della Commissione per i testi di lingua (7-9 aprile 1960)*. Bologna, 1961, p. 203-208.

MESNARD, P., *Le commerce épistolaire, comme expression sociale de l'individualisme humaniste*, in *Individu et société à la Renaissance*. Brussels and Paris, 1967. (Université libre de Bruxelles : Travaux de l'Institut pour l'étude de la Renaissance et de l'Humanisme, 3), p. 17-31.

NEUBERT, F., *Einführung in die französische und italienische Epistolarliteratur der Renaissance und ihre Probleme*, in *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 12 (1961), p. 67-93.

PIVEC, K., *Stil- und Sprachentwicklung in mittellateinischen Briefen vom 8.-12. Jh.*, in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungsband 14 (1939), p. 33-51.

RUHE, E., *De Amasio ad Amasiam : Zur Gattungsgeschichte des mittelalterlichen Liebesbriefes*. Munich, 1975. (Beiträge zur romanischen Philologie des Mittelalters, 10). [Appeared too late for full utilization here.]

SCHALLER, D., *Probleme der Überlieferung und Verfasserschaft lateinischer Liebesbriefe des hohen Mittelalters*, in *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, 3 (1966), p. 25-36.

SCHMEIDLER, B., *Ueber Briefsammlungen des früheren Mittelalters in Deutschland und ihre kritische Verwertung*, in *Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund : Årsbok (Yearbook of the New Society of Letters at Lund)*, 1926, p. 5-27.

STEINHAUSEN, G., *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes*. 2 vols. Berlin, 1889-1891. [Vol. 1, p. 20-110 on fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.]

SIMON, G., *Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriefe mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhundert*, in *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 4 (1958), p. 52-119 and 5-6 (1959-60), p. 73-153.

VALOIS, N., *De arte scribendi epistolas apud Gallicos medii aevi scriptores rhetoresve*. Paris, 1880.

WATTENBACH, W., *Iter Austriacum 1853. Anhang : Über Briefsteller des Mittelalters*, in *Archiv für Kunde österreichischer Geschichts-Quellen*, 14 (1855), p. 29-94.

3. LISTS OF LETTER-COLLECTIONS

OESTERLEY, H., *Wegweiser durch die Literatur der Urkundensammlungen*. Vol. 1, Berlin, 1885, p. 19-45.

4. ANTHOLOGIES

BROOKE, D., *Private Letters Pagan and Christian*. London, 1929.

BUTLER, K., *'The Gentlest Art' in Renaissance Italy : An Anthology of Italian Letters, 1459-1600*. Cambridge, 1954.

FERRERO, G. G., *Lettere del Cinquecento*. Turin, 1948. (Classici italiani, 36).

HAGENMEYER, H., *Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100. Eine Quellensammlung zur Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges*. Innsbruck, 1901.

LYELL, L., *A Mediaeval Post-Bag*. London, 1934. [Letters from the Stonor, Plumpton, Cely, Paston, Shillingford, and Marchall collections.]

OEHL, W., *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe des Mittelalters 1100-1550*. Munich, 1931. (Mystiker der Abendlandes, 1).

STEINHAUSEN, G., *Deutsche Privatbriefe des Mittelalters*. 2 vols. Berlin, 1899-1907. (Denkmäler der deutschen Kulturgeschichte, I, 1-2).

CHAPTER I

DEFINITION OF THE GENRE

1. NATURE OF THE GENRE

The historian using medieval letters and letter-collections must be ready to judge them by different standards than apply to letters today. Whereas intimacy, spontaneity, and privacy are now considered the essence of the epistolary genre, in the Middle Ages letters were for the most part self-conscious, quasi-public literary documents, often written with an eye to future collection and publication. In view of the way in which letters were written and sent, and also of the standards of literacy in the Middle Ages, it is doubtful whether there were any private letters in the modern sense of the term [6]. As in Antiquity, when the earliest letters were concerned with factual rather than private affairs [7], medieval letters were often intended to be read by more than one person even at the time they were written. They were therefore designed to be correct and elegant rather than original and spontaneous, and they often followed the form and content of model letters in formularies, of which the influence on letter-writing has not entirely vanished even today [8]. Well-known writers as well as hacks wrote letters which were basically no more than variants on letters drawn up by recognized masters of the art of letter-writing. No clear line can be drawn between the 'historical' and 'literary' aspects of medieval letters [9], therefore, and their worth as

[6] VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 16; DE GHELLINCK, *Essor*, vol. I, p. 111.

[7] VAN DEN HOUT, *Studies*, p. 152-153. Truly secret messages were conveyed by word of mouth (see p. 48 below).

[8] K. BURDACH, *Schlesisch-böhmische Briefmuster aus der Wende des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Berlin, 1926. (*Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation*, 5), p. 7-8; C. H. HASKINS, *The Life of Mediaeval Students as Illustrated by Their Letters*, in *Studies in Mediaeval Culture*. Oxford, 1929, p. 3.

[9] ERDMANN, *Briefliteratur*, p. 1-2, stressed this point, as did J. LECLERCQ, *Lettres de S. Bernard : Histoire ou littérature?*, in *Studi Medievali*, 3e S., 12 (1971), p. 1-74, who concluded (p. 72) that Bernard's letters were both history and literature. The recently-published 'Laaer Briefsammlung' of the second half of the thirteenth century (ed. M. WELTIN, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 21) is described in the publisher's publicity as a *Briefchronik* or chronicle in the form of letters.

historical sources must always be evaluated in the light of their literary character.

This breadth of scope makes it hard to find a strict definition for the epistolary genre. Letters were written in the Middle Ages in many different forms and styles, on many different subjects, and of very different length. Some letters are indistinguishable from official documents, and others from poems. Is the poetic *salut*, for instance, which developed out of the epistolary salutation as defined in the handbooks of letter-writing, an epistolary poem or a poetic epistle [10]? The question itself is a modern one, which would not have bothered men in the Middle Ages. Even the professional *dictatores* gave up in despair when faced with the task of classifying missive letters, of which the number of types, according to the *Summa prosarum dictaminis* written in Saxony in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, was beyond any estimate : 'And since we can therefore call them not a type (*species*) of letter but rather a very general genre (*genus*), their infinite generality allows us to attribute no definite rules to them. For it applies to any general letter that is sent. To distinguish them from the letters described above, however, we call those letters 'missive' which confer no authority, convey no legal right, [or] occasion no necessity, but which express and declare only the intention of the sender and recipient' [11]. These words still hold true as a general definition, but it applies only to missive letters and is hard to apply strictly even to them, since the intention of the sender, although it may have no definite legal or administrative force, may carry great authority.

Almost any material could be caste in the form of a letter if the writer chose to do so, and it was clearly regarded as an authentic letter in terms of the genre, broadly defined, if it conformed to a few simple rules. For this reason it is wise to avoid terms such as 'pseudo-letters' and 'quasi-letters', which usually imply a modern frame of reference and

[10] E. MELLI, *I « salut » e l'epistolografia medievale*, in *Convivium*, 30 (1962), p. 385-398; cf. RUHE, *De Amasio*, p. 97-119, 161-170, and 208-253 on the Provençal 'salutz' and Old French 'salut'.

[11] L. ROCKINGER, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des eilften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Munich, 1863. (Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte, 9), p. 260. Cf. H. BRESSLAU, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre für Deutschland und Italien*. Vol. 1, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1912, p. 3, n. 1, where he cited this passage with approval (as does DE BOÜARD, *Manuel de diplomatique*, vol. 1, p. 33) and vol. 2, 2nd. ed., Berlin, 1931, p. 261-262, on this work and its possible authors.

anachronistic criteria of what a letter should be. The term 'authentic' will be used here to apply to any work written in the form of a letter and adhering to some extent to the rules of the epistolary genre. The term 'real' will be used for letters which were actually sent, or intended to be sent, and the term 'fictional' will be used for letters, like model letters and treatises in epistolary form, which were not intended to be sent but which were considered letters by contemporaries.

The essence of the epistolary genre, both in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, was not whether a letter was actually sent but whether it performed a representative function. Letters originated as oral messages, when distance made speech impossible, and the earliest letters took the form of instructions to messengers, reminding them of what to say to the recipients [12]. 'Externally and internally', wrote Van den Hout, 'the oldest Greek letter is entirely a verbal message with relation to one subject only' [13]. The letter was thus regarded as half of a conversation or dialogue between the sender and the addressee, and it involved a quasi-presence and quasi-speech between the two [14]. According to Ambrose, 'The epistolary genre (*genus*) was devised in order that someone may speak to us when we are absent'; and the medieval masters of letter-writing similarly defined a letter as 'sermo absentium quasi inter presentes' and 'acsi ore ad os et presens' [15]. The Patriarch Nicholas I of Constantinople in one of his letters praised more highly than actual conversation the 'spiritual converse' of those separated in body, and in another letter he commented that, 'Physical distance by no means interrupts the close communion of those who are united in spirit' [16].

Later scholars have referred to this distance between the writer and recipient of a letter as the epistolary situation, without which no letter

[12] J. CHADWICK, *The Decipherment of Linear B*. New York, n.d. [1959], p. 131.

[13] VAN DEN HOUT, *Studies*, p. 23.

[14] M. M. WAGNER, *A Chapter in Byzantine Epistolography : The Letters of Theodoret of Cyrus*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 4 (1948), p. 131; KARLSSON, *Idéologie*, p. 34-40; THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 46 and 162-165; C. D. LANHAM, *'Salutatio' Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200 : Syntax, Style, and Theory*. Munich, 1975. (Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, 22), p. 103-104, citing Quintilian and Julius Victor and arguing for the continuity of 'the ancient concept of the letter as substitute for conversation' from Late Antiquity to the twelfth century.

[15] AMBROSE, Ep. 66, in *PL*, vol. 16, col. 1225 A; THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 183-184; BÜTOW, *Entwicklung*, p. 53-56.

[16] R. J. H. JENKINS and L. G. WESTERINK, *Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters*. Washington, D.C., 1973. (Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 2), p. 307 (Letter 63) and 437 (Letter 134), cf. also p. 465 (Letter 148).

would be written [17]. The letter is thus the result, said Thraede, of the coordination of friendship, which created a desire to bridge the gap between two people, and of writing, which provided the means to do so [18]. This gap was temporal as well as spatial. The writer of a letter knew that it would be received, if at all, some time in the future, and the use of tenses in letters may reflect this temporal gap [19]. Fictional letters in particular could be addressed to individuals either in the distant past, like Petrarch's letters to some of the great writers of Antiquity, or in the future, such as the hortatory letters from Christ, which enjoyed a steady circulation in the Middle Ages [20]. In terms of the epistolary situation, real letters bridged the gap principally of space, and fictional letters bridged the gap principally of time.

This concept of the letter as *sermo absentium* opened the way to including within the epistolary genre many works — especially works like sermons and polemical treatises, in which the writer sought to appeal directly to the reader — that would not today commonly be written in the form of a letter. Caesarius of Arles referred to his homilies as *epistulae* 'as if they are letters sent to us from our homeland', that is, letters from heaven [21]. And Peter Damiani wrote his treatise on divine omnipotence in the form of a letter not only because the genre was flexible and allowed him to write more or less what he wanted but also, I think, because it originated as a discussion at Monte Cassino and was seen by Damiani

[17] KOSKENNIEMI, *Studien*, p. 53 ('... die Grundlagen für diese Gattung von Anfang an in der dem echten Privatbrief entsprechenden Briefsituation gefunden wurden') and 155-200 (p. 169 : 'Das Wichtigste bei der Briefsituation ist, dass die Korrespondenten räumlich voneinander getrennt sind'.); DOTY, *Classification*, p. 193.

[18] THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 3.

[19] KOSKENNIEMI, *Studien*, p. 189-200 and 204.

[20] On letters from Christ, see R. PRIEBSCH, *Letter from Heaven on the Observance of the Lord's Day.* Oxford, 1936; C. BRUNEL, *Versions espagnole, provençale et française de la lettre du Christ tombée du ciel*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 68 (1950), p. 383-396; and W. R. JONES, *The Heavenly Letter in Medieval England*, in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, N.S. 6 (1975) 163-178; on letters from the Devil, see W. WATTENBACH, *Über erfundene Briefe in Handschriften des Mittelalters, besonders Teufelbriefe*, in *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Philosophisch-historischen Classe*, 1892⁹, p. 91-123. A letter from the Virgin to students and other fictional letters from divine and holy persons are mentioned by BURDACH, *Schlesisch-böhmische Briefmuster*, p. 22-23.

[21] G. MORIN, *Un nouveau recueil inédit d'homélies de S. Césaire d'Arles*, in *Revue bénédictine*, 16 (1899), p. 243. On later epistolary sermons, see J. LECLERCQ, *Recherches sur d'anciens sermons monastiques*, in *Revue Mabillon*, 36 (1946), p. 11-12.

as a continuation at a distance of the conversation started there [22]. Epistolary form was therefore also often used for apostolic works and for works of instruction and propaganda, when face-to-face persuasion was impossible. In the twelfth century, an epistolary sub-genre developed consisting of letters of monastic vocation, written to persuade people to enter the religious life [23].

Some link across the epistolary gap, some motive to bridge it, was essential to the writing of letters. It might be the desire to instruct or to convert, as seen above, but most frequently it was friendship, of which the importance was stressed by almost all epistolary theorists both in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages [24]. *Amicitia* at that time referred to a wider range of human relations than the term friendship usually does today, and it had broader implications. In the early Middle Ages, it was almost as important as kinship, since those who were neither relations nor friends were regarded as enemies [25]. Letters were often the only way to maintain or create these ties at a distance, and epistolary friendships, as between Augustine and Jerome, grew up even between people

[22] P. DAMIANI, *Lettre sur la toute-puissance divine*. Ed. and tr. A. CANTIN. Paris, 1972. (Sources chrétiennes, 191 : Série des textes monastiques d'Occident, 11), p. 268-70. In the early manuscripts it is entitled a *disputatio*.

[23] C. H. TALBOT, *A Letter of Roger, Abbot of Byland*, in *Analecta sacri ordinis Cisterciensis*, 7 (1951), p. 218-231 (218 : 'The letter to the individual rather than the sermon to the throng was their means of drawing recruits to the cloister'.) and J. LECLERCQ, *Lettres de vocation à la vie monastique*, in *Analecta monastica*. Vol. 3, Rome, 1955. (Studia Anselmiana, 37), p. 169-197. These letters sometimes developed in effect into small treatises on the nature of monasticism.

[24] WAGNER, *Byzantine Epistolography*, p. 132; KARLSSON, *Idéologie*, p. 57-78; KOSKENNIEMI, *Studien*, p. 115-127; THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 125-146. On the theme of friendship in the letters of St. Augustine, see V. NOLTE, *Augustins Freundschaftsideal in seinen Briefen*. Würzburg, 1939. (Cassiciacum, 6). Patriarch Nicholas I of Constantinople wrote in 913/4 to the Emir of Crete that, 'Of all the blessings which life brings to men... none is so blessed, none so pleasing to those who are wise as the acquisition and cultivation of friendship' : *Letters*, p. 13 (Letter 2).

[25] K. SCHMID, *Religiöses und sippengebundenes Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein in frühmittelalterlichen Gedenkbucheinträgen*, in *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 21 (1965), p. 40. Cf. P. A. BRUNT, *'Amicitia' in the Late Roman Empire*, in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 191 (N. S., 11) (1965), p. 1-20, who stressed in particular the political importance of friendship in the Roman Empire. On the ideal of friendship in the letters of Alcuin and other early medieval letter-writers, see F.-C. SCHEIBE, *Alcuin und die Briefe Karls des Grossen*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 15 (1959), p. 188-189.

who did not know each other personally [26]. Letters which today seem to have been only expressions of friendship, therefore, or an introduction for a messenger delivering an oral message, may in fact have served an important social and political function. In the twelfth century, and during the Renaissance, an ideal of disinterested friendship was also cultivated and helped to promote the cult of letter-writing at those times [27].

Letters were not only tokens of friendship, however, but also a mark of honor and favor to the recipient [28]. Sidonius, among others, stressed this aspect of letters [29], which must therefore be couched in suitable language and avoid any possibility of giving offense. A letter was a gift to the recipient, who was considered to own the text. 'In Antiquity', wrote De Ghellinck, 'when it was a question of epistolary correspondences, the proprietary right, the *dominium*, passed to the addressee, unless the author stipulated to the contrary' [30]. This fact had important implications, to which I shall return, not only for the character of epistolary collections, into which a letter might be inserted, but also for the text of a letter, which might be revised by the recipient.

2. EPISTOLARY FORM

As laid down in the *artes dictaminis* of the late Middle Ages, a letter was supposed to be constructed along certain very definite lines. According to Haskins, the usual theory was that, 'There should be five parts arranged in logical sequence. After the salutation — as to which the etiquette of the mediaeval scribe was very exacting, each class in society having its own terms of address and reply — came the exordium, consisting of some commonplace generality, a proverb, or a scriptural quotation,

[26] E. ARNS, *La technique du livre d'après saint Jérôme*. Paris, 1953, p. 92-94.

[27] J. LECLERCQ, *L'amitié dans les lettres au moyen âge : Autour d'un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque de Pétrarque*, in *Revue du moyen âge latin*, 1 (1945), p. 391-410; R. SPRANDEL, *Ivo von Chartres und seine Stellung in der Kirchengeschichte*. Stuttgart, 1962. (Pariser historische Studien, 1), p. 9-20; MESNARD, *Commerce épistolaire*, p. 25; and, on friendship in sixteenth-century humanist letters, R. STARN, *Donato Giannotti and his Epistolae*. Geneva, 1968. (Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance, 97), p. 11.

[28] WAGNER, *Byzantine Epistolography*, p. 140; KARLSSON, *Idéologie*, p. 112-137.

[29] PETER, *Brief*, p. 152.

[30] J. DE GHELLINCK, *Patristique et moyen âge : Études d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale*. Vol. 2 : *Introduction et compléments à l'étude de la patristique*. Gembloux and Brussels and Paris, 1947. (Museum Lessianum. Section historique, 7), p. 206.

and designed to put the reader in the proper frame of mind for granting the request to follow. Then came the statement of the particular purpose of the letter (the narration), ending in a petition which commonly has the form of a deduction from the major and minor premises laid down in the exordium and narration, and finally the phrases of the conclusion' [31].

The history of the survival and development of these rules, and also of those governing the choice and arrangement of words in a letter, during the period between Antiquity and the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when they were first explicitly formulated, are still obscure (see p. 28-30 below). Their influence was doubtless felt, but even in the late Middle Ages, when the *ars dictaminis* was known all over Europe, not all letters were written in accord with its rules, which were frequently disregarded by well-known writers of letters. But they none the less set a standard in accordance with which letters were supposed to be written.

The only indubitable signs of epistolary form throughout the Middle Ages are the salutation and subscription, which contain respectively the greetings and the farewell of the writer(s). The salutation might range in form between extreme brevity, consisting simply of the names of the writer and recipient and a word of greeting — or even an anonymous *Amico amicus salutem* —, elaborate ceremony, paying careful attention to the respective ranks and titles of the correspondents [32], and idiosyncracy, reflecting the individual literary style of the writer. In the patristic period, however, the subscription (usually consisting of *Vale* or *Valete*, without a date) was the only part of the letter written by the author

[31] HASKINS, *Studies*, p. 2-3.

[32] See P. KRÜGER, *Bedeutung und Entwicklung der Salutatio in den mittelalterlichen Briefstellern bis zum 14. Jahrhundert*. Greifswald, 1912 (which deals principally with the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries) and in particular, LANHAM, *Salutatio*. On the forms of address in late antique epistolography, see A. ENGELBRECHT, *Das Titelwesen bei den spätlateinischen Epistolographen*. Vienna, 1893, and H. WOLFRAM, *Intitulatio*, 1 : *Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts*. Graz and Vienna and Cologne, 1967. (Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Ergänzungsband 21), who has a chapter (p. 128-135) on royal titles in letters of the pre-Carolingian period. On the *intitulatio* in public acts, see L. GENICOT, *Les actes publics*. Turnhout, 1972. (Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, 3), p. 33-36; and on the attention paid by late medieval masters of *dictamen* to the proper ordering of names in the salutations to letters, see my forthcoming article on *The Structure of Medieval Society According to the Dictatores of the Twelfth Century*.

himself and served as both a signature and an authentication [33]. The presence of a salutation and subscription on any work shows that it was intended to be in epistolary form. Their absence, however, does not necessarily indicate that a work was not originally a letter, since either the salutation or subscription are missing in some letters owing either to a desire on the part of the writer to abbreviate or to conceal his identity, or that of the addressee, or to the carelessness of later copyists [34]. Some letters, like Petrarch's *Sine nomine*, were written from the start without any names on account of their compromising nature (see p. 48 below).

In practice it was therefore enough, in order to write a work in epistolary form, simply to put a salutation at the beginning and a subscription at the end. It was supposed also to conform, however, to the standard of the *modus* or *stylus epistolaris*, to which there are many references in letters throughout the Middle Ages and of which the requirements, though never spelled out, seem to have been two. The first and most

[33] E. DEKKERS, *Les autographes des Pères latins*, in *Colligere fragmenta : Festschrift Alban Dold*. Beuron, 1952. (Texte und Arbeiten herausgegeben durch die Erzabtei Beuron, I S., 2), p. 127-128. On the forms of salutation and subscription in early Christian epistolography, see A. A. R. BASTIAENSEN, *Le cérémonial épistolaire des chrétiens latins*, in *Graecitas et latinitas christianorum primaeva. Supplementa*, 2 (1964), p. 7-45; also L. DINNEEN, *Titles of Address in Christian Greek Epistolography to 527 A.D.* Washington, 1929. (Catholic University of America Patristic Studies, 18) and M. B. O'BRIEN, *Titles of Address in Christian Latin Epistolography to 543 A.D.* Washington, 1930. (Catholic University of America Patristic Studies, 21), who pointed out (p. 163) the difference in the manner of addressing bishops in the letters of Ambrose and Augustine. Cf. also E. JERG, *Vir venerabilis. Untersuchungen zur Titulatur der Bischöfe in den ausserkirchlichen Texten der Spätantike als Beitrag zur Deutung ihrer öffentlichen Stellung*. Vienna, 1970. (Wiener Beiträge zur Theologie, 26), who relies principally on legal sources but also includes evidence drawn from imperial letters and the *Variae* of Cassiodorus.

[34] All the *Variae* of Cassiodorus lack the protocol and eschatocol : see A. J. FRIDH, *Terminologie et formules dans les Variae de Cassiodore. Études sur le développement du style administratif aux derniers siècles de l'antiquité*. Stockholm, 1956. (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, 2), p. 10. Of Gerbert's letters, only thirty-five have an address and eighteen a *Vale* or *Valete* : F. WEIGLE, *Die Briefsammlung Gerberts von Reims*. Berlin and Zürich and Dublin, 1966. (MGH : Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit, 2), p. 6. J.-M. De SMET remarked on the absence and presence of subscriptions in different manuscripts and versions of the letters of Ivo of Chartres in a review of the first volume of a new edition by J. LECLERCQ in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 45 (1950), p. 262. For reasons that are not entirely clear, all the letters of Jean de Montreuil lack the names of recipients : JEAN DE MONTREUIL, *Opera*, I.1 : *Epistolario*. Ed. E. ORNATO. Turin, 1963. (Università di Torino : Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia. Fondazione Parini Chirio), p. XXI-XXIV. Cf. STARN, *Giannotti*, p. 8.

important of these was brevity [35], which was sometimes treated almost as the synonym of the *modus epistolaris* and which was a stylistic ideal for all writers and particularly for the writers of letters [36]. This is not to suggest that there were any defined limits on the length of letters, many of which today seem of inordinate length, and no survey has been made of the average number of words in medieval letters, as has been done for Antiquity [37]. The ideal of epistolary *brevitas* is therefore perhaps best defined in a negative sense, that a letter, depending upon its subject matter, should not encroach, as Wagner put it, 'upon the fuller developments proper to other literary forms' [38]. Brevity is often cited as a reason for omitting an additional argument or example, for restricting the treatment of a particular point, or for coming quickly to a conclusion — or, in apology, for not concluding more quickly [39]. 'I have exceeded the mode of epistolary brevity,' wrote St. Bruno to his friend Ralph, 'so that I shall at least tarry with you longer in conversation while I am unable to have you with me in body' [40]. And St. Bernard, at the end of *De praecepto et dispensatione*, admitted that he had exceeded the *modus epistolaris*, saying that his reader might call it either a letter or a book as he thought best [41].

[35] On the ideal of brevity in letters in Antiquity, see SYKUTRIS, *Epistolographie*, p. 193 and ARNS, *Technique*, p. 97-98 (p. 98 : 'Ces exemples nous prouvent que la brièveté était bien une qualité de toute lettre familière dans l'antiquité'.). For the Middle Ages, see, among others, SIMON, *Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriefe*, p. 82-96, who said that *brevitas* was regarded as the closest way to truth.

[36] E. R. CURTIUS, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*. Bern, 1948, p. 481-487, and T. JANSON, *Latin Prose Prefaces. Studies in Literary Conventions*. Stockholm and Göteborg and Uppsala, 1964. (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia latina Stockholmiensia, 13), p. 96 and 154-155. On the various stylistic modes of prose and poetry (but not including the *modus epistolaris*), see F. QUADLBAUER, *Die antike Theorie der genera dicendi im lateinischen Mittelalter*. Vienna, 1962. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte, 241²).

[37] Cf. ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 37-41, and A. WIKENHAUSER, *New Testament Introduction*. Tr. J. CUNNINGHAM. New York, 1958, p. 346-347 : private letters on papyrus range between 18 and 209 words (87 average); those in literary collections were considerably longer. Paul's letters range between 335 and 7101 words, with an average of 1300.

[38] WAGNER, *Byzantine Epistolography*, p. 137.

[39] In addition to the examples cited below, see those in PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 3.

[40] A. WILMART, *Deux lettres concernant Raoul le Verd, l'ami de saint Bruno*, in *Revue bénédictine*, 51 (1939), p. 270.

[41] BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *De praecepto et dispensatione*. XX (61). Ed. J. LECLERCQ, *Sancti Bernardi opera*. Vol. 3, Rome, 1963, p. 294.

This ideal of brevity was especially emphasized by the *dictatores*, and not all contemporaries liked their tendency to shorten and formalize the writing of letters. Peter the Venerable, for instance, many of whose own letters are very long and who esteemed a leisured and elegant style, complained of 'the desire for brevity to which modern men are allured by I know not what inborn laziness' and compared it elsewhere with the practice of the ancients, next to whose letters, he said, 'even my longest ones will appear very short'. 'The *modus epistolaris*, in particular of contemporaries', he wrote in another letter, 'puts a would-be writer in such a strait-jacket that he cannot write even on business matters' [42]. There were always some letter-writers who refused to be brief, therefore, but brevity remained an ideal. In the fifteenth century the letters of Politian were particularly admired, among others by Erasmus, on account of their brevity [43].

The second requirement of the *modus epistolaris*, which was even less frequently defined and perhaps even less observed than brevity, was that a letter should be restricted to a single subject. This was the practice in the earliest known letters in Antiquity, and it persisted as an ideal which tended to set off the epistolary genre from other types of literature. Sidonius, for instance, after listing various types of his own letters, wrote that, 'As a rule, single subjects are dealt with in single letters' [44]. The *dictatores* later took up this point, emphasizing that the object of a letter should always be a specific request rather than a narrative or exposition, and while this seems to have had little effect on the literary and learned correspondence of the humanists, it set a pattern for the composition of many letters concerned with more prosaic affairs.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF TYPES OF LETTERS

The epistolary genre began to diversify almost as soon as it was invented, and efforts were made to define and classify various types of letters which were written in different styles and on different subjects. Cicero,

[42] PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 44-45 (Ep. 24 to the Carthusians), 109-110 (Ep. 34 to Cardinal Haimeric), and 134 (Ep. 40 to Gilo). Cf. *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 35-36.

[43] A. GERLO, *L'Opus de conscribendis epistolis*, in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia*. Paris and Toronto, 1972. (Douzième stage international d'études humanistes, Tours, 1969), vol. 1, p. 228-229.

[44] SIDONIUS, Ep. VII, 18,4. Ed. and tr. W. B. ANDERSON, *Sidonius, Poems and Letters*. Vol. 2, Cambridge (Mass.), 1965. (Loeb Classical Library), p. 398.

who more than any other single writer was responsible for the development of Latin epistolography, wrote to Curionus :

> You know that there are many sorts (*genera*) of letters, but the clearest is that of which the purpose is to let someone who is absent know about something they should know concerning us or themselves. You certainly do not expect letters of this sort from me, for among your own servants you have both scribes and messengers. There is nothing new, moreover, in my affairs. There are two other sorts of letters which please me greatly, one familiar and jesting, the other severe and grave [45].

What might therefore today appear simply to be moods of the writer, reflected in his letters, constituted for Cicero different sorts of letters, of which the purpose was to convey not news but either good cheer or seriousness. Sidonius in the letter cited above distinguished five types of letters among his correspondence, saying that he had written some in exhortation, many in praise, others in persuasion, a few in lamentation, and several in joking [46]. The effort to classify different types of letters was taken up by the *dictatores* in the later Middle Ages, including Erasmus in his treatises on letter-writing. The author of the Saxon *Summa* gave up when it came to missive letters, as seen above, but others persisted, and the index to Rockinger's collection of formularies lists over fifty varieties of letter to which the *dictatores* gave different names.

More recent scholars have also attempted to classify letters on the basis of their content, purpose, form, or style and also to find a more general definition for the epistolary genre as a whole. Most of these efforts make use of modern criteria and thus impose on letters written in the Middle Ages distinctions which were unknown at the time, but they have also contributed to an understanding of the nature of ancient and medieval epistolography.

Students of medieval diplomatics have in particular tried to distinguish letters on the basis of their content and function. Like the author of the Saxon *Summa*, they have argued that letters differed from charters and diplomas in that they served no legal or administrative purpose and expressed 'only the intention of the sender and recipient'. This distinction was clearly known on a practical basis in the Middle Ages, as is shown by the fact that the originals of many charters, which were

[45] CICERO, Ep. ad fam., II, 4. Ed. L. C. PURSER, *Cicero, Epistulae ad Familiares*. Oxford, n.d. (Oxford Classical Texts).

[46] SIDONIUS, Ep. VII, 18, 2. Ed. and tr. W. B. ANDERSON. Vol. 2, p. 396.

of evidentiary value, were preserved, whereas almost all letters, which were of purely literary value, have survived only in copies [47]. With regard to administrative documents, however, the distinction is less clear. In particular, many letters which have survived in isolated copies, either as originals or outside formal collections, tend to be more administrative than literary in character and are difficult to classify. They were often preserved because they had practical or evidentiary value. Papal letters, for instance, were usually dated, unlike most letters, and constitute a special category to which attention will be paid elsewhere in the *Typologie* as a type of public document [48]. English royal writs were invariably drawn up in epistolary form [49], and the *mandements* of the French kings can be distinguished from missive letters only by the fact that their object was to communicate an order, according the Prou and Ganshof [50], or, even less clearly, on the basis of whether or not they were recognized in chancery, according to Tessier, who admitted that this criterion was theoretical and sometimes hard to apply. 'A margin of indecision remains on both sides of the frontier', he concluded [51]. In fact, as other diplomatists have recognized, there is no clear line of demarcation between public and official 'documents'

[47] Cf. P. CLASSEN, *Aus der Werkstatt Gerhochs von Reichersberg. Studien zur Entstehung und Überlieferung von Briefen, Briefsammlungen und Widmungen*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 23 (1967), p. 39-40 and 88.

[48] Many papal letters are therefore found in canonical collections and in cartularies, where they served a clearly practical purpose. The famous 'letter-collections' of Popes Gregory I and Gregory VII are in many respects official compilations having more in common with the later papal registers than they do with many contemporary collections of letters.

[49] T. A. M. BISHOP and P. CHAPLAIS, *Facsimiles of English Royal Writs to A.D. 1100 Presented to Vivian Hunter Galbraith*. Oxford, 1957, p. XI.

[50] M. PROU, *Recueil des actes de Philippe Ier roi de France (1059-1108)*. Paris, 1908. (Chartes et diplômes relatifs à l'histoire de France), p. CCV-CCVII and F. L. GANSHOF, *Trois mandements perdus du roi de France Louis VI intéressant la Flandre*, in *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis gesticht onder de Benaming Société d'Emulation te Brugge*, 87 (1950), p. 117-133. Clearly all letters explicitly using the term *mandare* may be classified as *mandements*, but it is less obvious at what point the use of equivalent words or phrases, or any expression of the will of the writer, can be used to distinguish *mandements* from missive letters, many of which convey, even if indirectly, the wishes of the writer.

[51] G. TESSIER, *Diplomatique royale française*. Paris, 1962, p. 122-123 (and p. 70-71 on *mandements* and 230, n. 5, for his criticism of Prou on this subject).

and unofficial and private 'letters' in the Middle Ages [52]. They were often referred to by the same names, drawn up by the same persons, and found mixed together in the same collections [53]. While on a practical level the difference is usually clear, there seems to be no satisfactory theoretical distinction on this basis.

Distinctions based on form are useful in the interpretation of individual documents but not as criteria to classify letters in general or epistolary sub-genres. The fact that most medieval letters were not dated, for instance, is interesting and significant, and it would be of value to establish why and when the modern practice of dating private letters became current; but too many medieval letters bear a date to make its absence a characteristic of the genre, any more than the presence of a date can be said to mark an administrative or business document. Similarly, the form and content of some letters show them to have been encyclicals, which some scholars have therefore considered a sub-genre of medieval epistolography; but there are other letters, of which identical or substantially similar versions are known to have been sent to more than one recipient, which differ in no way from letters sent to a single recipient. The form and style of a letter tended to be correlated to its purpose increasingly as the Middle Ages progressed and the *dictatores* established their rules for different types of letters designed for command, request, censure, condolence, advice, and other purposes; but many writers continued to disregard the rules and to choose the epistolary form precisely on account of its freedom and flexibility.

Classifications based on the character and style of letters are equally hard to sustain and, as a rule, even more anachronistic. 'The familiar and

[52] Cf. A. GIRY, *Manuel de diplomatique*. Paris, 1894, p. 9 and 534, and BRESSLAU, *Handbuch*, vol. 1, p. 2, both of whom emphasized that the same names were used for various types of documents in the Middle Ages. The evidence of the *Variae* of Cassiodorus suggests that in Late Antiquity the term *epistula* was used for private letters rather than the productions of the imperial chancery : see A. J. FRIDH, *Terminologie et formules dans les Variae de Cassiodore*, p. 69-70. It would be interesting to know when the use of the term, and of *litterae*, was generalized.

[53] Cf. C. ERDMANN, *Untersuchungen zu den Briefen Heinrichs IV.*, in *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, 16 (1939), p. 252-253; C. R. CHENEY, *English Bishops' Chanceries 1100-1250*. Manchester, 1950. (Publications of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Manchester, 3), p. 119-121; G. HÖDL, *Die Admonter Briefsammlung 1158-1162 (cvp. 629)*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 25 (1969), p. 377 and 26 (1970), p. 182, who stressed that the terminological distinction between *Brief* and *Urkunde* is modern and that both 'literary' and 'practical' documents are found in the Admont collection.

intimate character', which one author spoke of as in large measure giving its value to the epistolary genre [54], refers to an aspect of modern rather than of medieval epistolography and cannot serve as a criterion of even a clear sub-genre of letters in the Middle Ages. Likewise, the distinction that letters were more influenced by literary and rhetorical elements in their style and that documents were more bound to formulas, while not untrue in particular instances, cannot serve as a general rule [55]. And the same is true of other systems of classification, including those of the *dictatores* themselves, to all of which too many exceptions can be found to make them generally useful.

One of the most important distinctions which has been drawn is that between the epistle and the letter, which was formulated with particular reference to the letters in the New Testament by A. Deissmann, who argued that an epistle was literary and intended for publication and that a letter was unliterary and intended for the addressee only [56]. Though it is still used by some Biblical and classical scholars [57], this distinction was questioned many years ago by students of epistolography. Roller in his book on the letters of St. Paul, for instance, argued that, 'Any written communication which serves as a substitute for a meaningful oral message, which is presented in the form conventionally accepted for such documents, and which is addressed to a particular person or group is ... a letter, be its content of private or public interest, its style formless or mannered, its recipient a simple individual or a circle widely extended in space or time' [58].

More recently another general definition of letters, also in refutation of Deissmann, has been put forward by Doty, who wrote that a letter was 'a *literary* product, intended for a *private or public* reader/s or only formally in letter form. *Letter form* is distinguished by 1) *being sent*

[54] A. L. FOULET, *Lettres françaises du XIIIe siècle : Jean Sarrasin, Lettre à Nicolas Arrode (1249)*. Paris, 1924. (Classiques français du moyen âge, 43), p. VI.

[55] H. APPELT, *Die Kaiseridee Friedrich Barbarossas*. Vienna, 1967. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte, 252⁴), p. 5.

[56] A. DEISSMANN, *Licht vom Osten*. 4 ed. Tübingen, 1923, p. 194-196, and in many earlier works.

[57] Cf. PETER, *Brief*, p. 11; WIKENHAUSER, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 350; G. LUCK, *Brief und Epistel in der Antike*, in *Das Altertum*, 7 (1961), p. 77-84; THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 1-3.

[58] ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 22-28, whose argument is cited here in the summary by WAGNER, *Byzantine Epistolography*, p. 122.

or intended for sending; 2) *from a writer* or from writers; 3) *to an addressee* or to addressees; 4) with greetings, conclusion, or other *formally stylized components*; and usually 5) with reference to or clear *intent to be a letter*'[59]. Doty rejected any definition based on the content, function, form, or situation of the writer of the letter and allowed only a distinction between what he called more private letters, written 'within the framework of an immediate relationship', and less private letters, among which he included all types of official, public, 'non-real', discursive, and other types of letters [60]. In practice, he emphasized, these categories often overlapped, and a particular letter might fall under more than one heading.

Even so flexible and sophisticated a definition as this, however, hardly meets all the requirements of medieval epistolography, which is so broad and varied as to defy any strict definition or classification. 'There are innumerable texts from the Middle Ages which are presented in the form of letters', wrote Langlois, stressing that any distinctions drawn between different types of letters were mostly modern and unknown in the Middle Ages [61]. Thus the terms *epistola, carta,* and *opusculum* were equated by Onulf of Speyer in the eleventh century [62]. Eadmer referred to Anselm's *De incarnatione verbi* as 'opus epistolari stilo conscriptum' [63]; and Peter the Venerable referred to letters by himself and others both as *libellus* and as *tractatus* [64]. It may be useful for the *dictatores* and later scholars to define the genre more narrowly and to find sub-genres within it, but for most writers in the Middle Ages a letter was any work which fitted the epistolary situation, was furnished with a salutation and subscription, and paid at least lip-service to the requirements of the *modus epistolaris*.

[59] DOTY, *Classification*, p. 158 (his italics).

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 196-197. Among official letters he includes various sorts of administrative, business, and legal letters; among public letters, open and model letters; among 'non-real' letters, pseudonymous, imaginary, and divine letters; among discursive letters, magical, scholarly, and didactic letters; and among other types, amorous, poetic, and inserted letters and letters of consolation, dedication, introduction, and congratulation.

[61] C. V. LANGLOIS, *Lettres missives, suppliques, pétitions, doléances* [in the first half of the fourteenth century], in *Histoire littéraire de la France*. Vol. 36, pt. 2, Paris, 1927, p. 532-533.

[62] W. WATTENBACH, *Magister Onulf von Spier*, in *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Philosophisch-historischen Classe*, 1894, p. 380.

[63] EADMER, *Vita sancti Anselmi*. Ed. R. W. SOUTHERN. London, 1962. ([Nelson's] Medieval Texts), p. 73.

[64] PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 3, n. 8.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

In the art of epistolography, as in so many other respects, the Middle Ages was the heir to Antiquity. Classical Latin letters, especially those of Cicero and Seneca, were read throughout the Middle Ages [65]; classical works on rhetoric and grammar helped to preserve the traditions of epistolographical form and style [66]; and ancient practices were kept alive in the obscure but unbroken tradition of practical letter-writing down through the Renaissance [67]. Owing in part to these influences, and in part also perhaps to the broad and flexible nature of the genre, there was a high degree of continuity in letter-writing, and it may be difficult to tell a letter, apart from its contents, written in one period from that written in another. In general terms, however, four periods can be distinguished in the development of medieval epistolography : Late Antiquity (fourth to mid-sixth century), Carolingian (mid-eighth to ninth century), High Medieval (eleventh and twelfth centuries), and Late Medieval and Humanist (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). Each of these periods affected in some way or another the content, form, or style of letter-writing and thus left its mark, in addition to the sheer number of letters written, on the history of medieval epistolography. Letters were of course also written at other times, but the art was less actively cultivated and the evolution therefore less marked.

1. LATE ANTIQUITY

From the fourth century through the first half of the sixth was a busy period of letter-writing by both pagans and Christians. According to the figures given by Sister Mary O'Brien in her book on Christian Latin epistolography, 177 letters by eleven writers survive from the third century, 385 by twenty-one writers from the fourth century, 933 by forty-one writers from the fifth century, and the same number by eleven writers from the first half of the sixth century, after which the number falls off [68]. Both the high level of literacy and the relative ease of communications at this time may have contributed to the cult of letter-writing. As Brooke put it, 'There was scarcely anything that could not be the subject of a letter' [69].

The traditional Latin epistolographical formulas, especially of salutation and subscription, were rapidly adopted by Christian writers [70], who at the same time expanded the genre, to some extent under the influence of the letters of St. Paul, to include an even wider variety of types of work than before [71]. Epistolary prefaces, of which the earliest known example is that of Hirtius to the eighth book of the *De Bello Gallico*, and epistolary dedications became recognized sub-genres of epistolography, together with other types of letters [72].

Reference has already been made to the types of letters mentioned by Sidonius, who apparently distinguished the genre of letters from that of history [73]. Theologians and churchmen like Augustine and Paulinus, according to Courcelle, saw the letter 'above all as a theoretical

---

[65] VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 23. Cf. M. MANITIUS, *Handschriften antiker Autoren in mittelalterlichen Bibliothekskatalogen*. Leipzig, 1935. (Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen, 67), p. 20 ff., on manuscripts of Cicero's letters in medieval library catalogues. Lorsch alone had five in the ninth century. Richard of Poitiers in the twelfth century compared the epistolary style of Peter the Venerable to that of Cicero : E. BERGER, *Notice sur divers manuscrits de la Bibliothèque vaticane : Richard le Poitevin*. Paris, 1879. (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 6), p. 121-122. On the letters of Seneca, see L. D. REYNOLDS, *The Medieval Tradition of Seneca's Letters*. Oxford, 1965.

[66] LANHAM, *Salutatio*, p. 93, concluded on the evidence of formula-collections and of surviving letters that, 'More epistolary theory was being taught and practiced during those several centuries [from the fourth to the eleventh] than we have direct evidence for.' Cf. BURDACH, *Schlesisch-böhmische Briefmuster*, p. 57 ff., on the influence on letter-writing of Cicero's rhetorical works.

[67] A. GERLO, *The Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis of Erasmus and the Tradition of the Ars Epistolica*, in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 500-1500*. Ed. R. R. BOLGAR. Cambridge, 1971, p. 103-114.

[68] O'BRIEN, *Titles of Address*, p. 161. For secular letters, see O. GUENTHER, *Epistulae imperatorum pontificum aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad a. DLIII datae avellana quae dicitur collectio*. Prague and Vienna and Leipzig, 1895. (Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, 35).

[69] BROOKE, *Private Letters*, p. 20.

[70] BASTIAENSEN, *Cérémonial épistolaire*, p. 9.

[71] M. SCHANZ, *Geschichte der römischen Litteratur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian*. Vol. 4, pt. 2, Munich, 1920. (Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, 8), p. 643; THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 187.

[72] JANSON, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, p. 106-112, who said (p. 106) that, 'So far as I can see, these prefaces have no striking features in common other than their epistolary form'; and SIMON, *Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriefe*.

[73] SIDONIUS, Ep. IV, 22, 1. Ed. and tr. W. B. ANDERSON. Vol. 2, p. 144, where he spoke of turning 'ad stilum historiae' after completing his letters.

exposition, while they gave their practical instructions, even if they were of considerable importance, to the messenger carrying the letter' [74].

The patristic letter-writers also contributed notably to the development of the practice of collecting letters, which will be discussed later [75]. From this period come the great collection of Jerome, who has been called 'the first in date of the letter-writers in the sense that we now give to the term' and whose letters were read and imitated throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance [76], and also those of Augustine, Cassiodorus, Sidonius, Ennodius, Ruricius, and many others who wrote with a conscious eye on the future and whose letters were collected during their lifetimes. Almost no letters, indeed, survive from this period except in collections or associated with some other work, such as letters of dedication. Augustine apparently made small collections of his letters, out of which the large collection was later formed, with many gaps; Jerome included fictional letters which he had never intended to be sent; and Cassiodorus gathered his letters so that posterity might know, as he put it, 'both the difficulties of my labors ... and the uncorrupted action of a sincere conscience' [77].

The style and language of letters also showed both continuity and transition in this period. St. Ambrose, for instance, was 'predominantly classical in his choice of words' in his letters, and Fridh commented on the similarity of both the language and the form of the *Variae* of Cassiodorus with earlier and later official documents [78]. Even as late

[74] P. COURCELLE, *Les lacunes de la correspondance entre saint Augustin et Paulin de Nole*, in *Revue des études anciennes*, 53 (1951), p. 298.

[75] DE GHELLINCK, *Patristique*, vol. 2, p. 200-214.

[76] H. LECLERCQ, *Lettres chrétiennes*, col. 2826. Cf. DE GHELLINCK, *Patristique*, vol. 2, p. 210-211, and especially ARNS, *Technique*, passim.

[77] On the letter-collection of Augustine, see D. DE BRUYNE, *Notes sur les lettres de saint Augustin*, in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 23 (1927), p. 523-530, and *Les anciennes collections et la chronologie des lettres de Saint Augustin*, in *Revue bénédictine*, 43 (1931), p. 284-295; H. LIETZMANN, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Briefsammlung Augustins*, in *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, 1930, p. 356-388; COURCELLE, *Lacunes*, p. 253-300. On Jerome's collection, see DE BRUYNE, *Notes*, p. 528, and especially ARNS, *Technique*, p. 100-103. On Cassiodorus, see SCHANZ, *Geschichte der römischen Litteratur*, vol. 4, pt. 2, p. 98-99, and 341, where he said of Cassiodorus's letters : 'Der Zweck der Veröffentlichung ist durchaus ein stilistischer gewesen, kein historischer'. Schanz has sections on other letter-collections and on letters generally (p. 339-341 and 643).

[78] M. A. ADAMS, *The Latinity of the Letters of Saint Ambrose*. Washington, 1927. (Catholic University of America Patristic Studies, 12), p. 129, and FRIDH, *Terminologie*

as the first half of the seventh century Bishop Desiderius of Cahors and his friends used the same phraseology in their letters as Sidonius and Ruricius, though not always with the same skill [79]. At the same time, however, and sometimes in works of the same writers, the obscure beginnings were taking place of the shift from metrical to accentual *clausulae*, that is, the rhythmical patterns of the endings of phrases and sentences (*clausulae*) came to be based on accent (syllabic stress) rather than on meter (syllabic length or quantity), as they had been in the time of Cicero and the classical Latin prose writers [80]. Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine all showed a tendency to compose their *clausulae* on the basis of accent rather than of quantity, and the letters of Gregory the Great, according to Brazzel, 'show without question a conscious striving for accentual *clausulae*' [81]. Many more studies of this type are needed, for writers both of this period and of the early Middle Ages, in order to establish more precisely the degree of continuity and development in the patterns

et formules dans les Variae de Cassiodore, p. 9-10, who said (p. 9) that, 'Le premier fait qui saute aux yeux quand on lit les *Variae* est que la forme générale des lettres de Cassiodore correspond à la pratique fixée dans les actes publics et privés du moyen âge'. On the language of the *Variae*, see also O. J. ZIMMERMANN, *The Late Latin Vocabulary of the Variae of Cassiodorus, with special advertence to the technical terminology of administration*. Washington, 1944. (The Catholic University of America : Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin Language and Literature, 15). On the similarity and continuity of formulas on Greek letters, see EXLER, *Form*, p. 133.

[79] D. NORBERG, *Remarques sur les lettres de saint Didier de Cahors*, in *Classical, Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*. Ed. C. HENDERSON, JR. Vol. 1, Rome, 1964. (Storia e letteratura, 93), p. 278-279.

[80] There is a considerable literature on this topic. See in particular M.-G. NICOLAU, *L'origine du « cursus » rhythmique et les débuts de l'accent d'intensité en latin*. Paris, 1930; some of the collected articles by F. DI CAPUA, *Scritti minori*. Rome, 1959, 2 vols.; G. LINDHOLM, *Studien zum mittellateinischen Prosarhythmus*. Stockholm, 1963. (Acta universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia latina Stockholmiensia, 10); and, for the later period, K. POLHEIM, *Die lateinische Reimprosa*. Berlin, 1925. On the shift from the metrical to the accentual patterns in the patristic period, see the series of theses presented at the Catholic University of America and published in its two series of Patristic Studies and Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin Language and Literature on various works of Augustine (G. REYNOLDS, 1924; M. B. CARROLL, 1940: M. J. BRENNAN, 1947), Ambrose (M. R. DELANEY, 1934), Hilary of Poitiers (M. E. MANN, 1936), Jerome (M. C. HERRON, 1937); Gregory the Great (K. BRAZZEL, 1939), and Cassiodorus (M. J. SUELZER, 1944).

[81] K. BRAZZEL, *The Clausulae in the Works of St. Gregory the Great*. Washington, 1939. (Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin Language and Literature, 11), p. 77.

of rhythmical prose, but potentially they furnish a valuable clue to the authorship and date of letters and to the survival of ancient epistolary practices.

After about the middle of the sixth century, however, the number of surviving letters declines sharply, owing in large part, doubtless, to the disturbed conditions of the time and also, perhaps, to changes in literary fashion which made the collecting of letters less common. Those of Desiderius of Cahors, for instance, were collected long after his death, during the Carolingian period, by the monk who also wrote his life [82]. Their form and style show, as mentioned above, that the epistolary traditions of the patristic age did not die out at this time. The types and topoi of ancient rhetoric persisted through the early Middle Ages and formed the basis of the future art of letter-writing [83]; and the rhythmical patterns which later developed into the *cursus* continued to be used; but too little is known in the present state of research to make any sure statements.

2. CAROLINGIAN AGE

The revival of the practice of writing and collecting letters in the eighth and ninth centuries was promoted both by the improved communications within the Carolingian Empire and by the renewed interest in classical literature and learning. Heralded by the letters of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries like Boniface and Lull, this revival involved almost every major figure of the Carolingian Renaissance, such as Alcuin, Lupus of Ferrières, Hincmar, and Rabanus Maurus, and produced a wide variety of types of letters, including a distinctive genre of epistolary poems (or poetic epistles), which flourished at the court of Charlemagne [84]. Many secular rulers and nobles also exchanged letters in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Very little is known about Carolingian epistolary practice or its contribution to the evolution of the genre as a whole, and more work needs to be done on individual letters and collections. Wallach has shown that Alcuin kept and consulted copies of his own letters, contrary to

[82] D. NORBERG, *Epistulae S. Desiderii Cadurcensis.* Stockholm, 1961. (Acta universitatis Stockholmiensis. Studia latina Stockholmiensia, 6), p. 5-6.

[83] BURDACH, *Schlesisch-böhmische Briefmuster*, p. 9.

[84] D. SCHALLER, *Vortrags- und Zirkulardichtung am Hof Karls des Grossen*, in *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, 6 (1970), p. 14-36.

the previous view that they were kept and copied by his contemporaries, and Edelstein has made a detailed study of the language of his letters [85]. But until similar studies have been made of other collections, scholars must depend to a great extent on inference. Thus the fact that in the only notable letter-collection from the tenth century, that of Ratherius of Verona, who was educated in the Carolingian tradition, there is clear evidence of the use of both rhymed and rhythmical prose, shows that its use survived the preceding period, although it is not found in all letters [86]. Kristeller also remarked that the arrangement of the letter by Gunzo of Novara to the monks of Reichenau followed the scheme laid down by the later *dictatores* and concluded that, 'Hence it appears that the practice of letter writing preceded in this respect (and perhaps in other ways) the theory of the *Dictamen*, and that the origin of such characteristic theories as the six parts of the letter must be traced back beyond the earliest extant writers on *dictamen*' [87].

3. ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES

What has been called the Golden Age of medieval epistolography was ushered in at the end of the tenth century by the letter-collection of Gerbert, which dates from his second stay at Rheims, between 984 and 997. For the following two centuries at least a few letters have survived from almost every literary figure of note, and from many of no note at all! The prodigious flowering of letter-writing at this time produced an abundance of letters of all types. Its causes are unknown, but it was doubtless associated, as in previous periods of active letter-writing, with the improved communications and more extensive travelling of the age — crusading letters, for instance, form a sub-genre at this time — and with the cultivation of classical literature and culture [88]. Erdmann

[85] L. WALLACH, *Alcuin and Charlemagne.* Ithaca, 1959. (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology, 32), p. 266-274; W. EDELSTEIN, *Eruditio und Sapientia : Weltbild und Erziehung in der Karolingerzeit. Untersuchungen zu Alcuins Briefen.* Freiburg im B., 1965.

[86] F. WEIGLE, *Die Briefe Rathers von Verona*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 1 (1937), p. 187; H. SILVESTRE, *Comment on rédigeait une lettre au Xe siècle : L'épître d'Éracle de Liège à Rathier de Vérone*, in *Le Moyen Âge*, 58 (4th S., 7) (1952), p. 1-30, who found the use of the *cursus* and rhythmical prose in this letter. Cf. F. WEIGLE, *Die Briefe des Bischofs Rather von Verona.*Weimar, 1949. (MGH : Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit, 1).

[87] P. O. KRISTELLER, *Renaissance Philosophy and the Mediaeval Tradition.* Latrobe, 1966. (Wimmer Lecture, 15), p. 89, n. 19.

[88] L. OTT, *Untersuchungen zur theologischen Briefliteratur der Frühscholastik.* Münster in W., 1937. (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des

noted a dramatic improvement in the level of Latinity and grammar in the imperial letters between the middle of the tenth and middle of the eleventh centuries [88]. The classics provided not only models of epistolary style and form but also a theoretical basis for the cultivation of the art of letter-writing. In particular, the interest in Cicero's *De amicitia*, which was the most widely read and imitated treatise on friendship in the Middle Ages, promoted a cult of friendship based on disinterested affection, which in turn encouraged the active exchange of letters between friends [90]. From a broad point of view, therefore, the epistolography of the eleventh and twelfth centuries can be seen as part of the humanist culture of the age.

There was a proliferation at this time not only of the number but also of the types of letters, corresponding to the growing variety in intellectual, social, and religious life. The new intellectual life gave rise to scholarly correspondences like that on mathematics, dating from about 1025, between Ragimbold of Cologne and Radolf of Liège [91], and later to the great collections of theological letters of Walter of Mortagne and Hugh and Richard of St. Victor [92]. The religious revival produced the type of recruiting letter, mentioned above, which praised the attractions of monastic life; and the new schools and universities led to a mass of letters concerned with students and their affairs. 'Of the hundreds of formularies and collections of letters preserved in the larger European libraries', wrote Haskins, 'probably the greater number contain some reference to student affairs, and several seem to have been composed with special

Mittelalters, 34), p. 3-4. On the mixture of classical and biblical elements in the letters of Hildebert of Lavardin, see P. VON MOOS, *Hildebert von Lavardin, 1056-1133*. Stuttgart, 1965. (Pariser historische Studien, 3), p. 60 and 77-91. On crusading letters, see P. RIANT, *Inventaire critique des lettres historiques des croisades*, in *Archives de l'Orient latin*, 1 (1881), p. 1-224, and HAGENMAYER, *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, who edits twenty-three letters with an elaborate commentary.

[89] ERDMANN, *Untersuchungen*, p. 207.

[90] Cf. the works cited n. 27 above and, on the influence of Cicero, M.-M. DAVY, *Un traité de l'amour du XIIᵉ siècle : Pierre de Blois*. Paris, 1932; P. DELHAYE, *Deux adaptations du 'De amicitia' de Cicéron au XIIᵉ siècle*, in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 15 (1948), p. 304-331; and other works cited in PETER THE VENE-RABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 39, n. 171-172.

[91] P. TANNERY and A. CLERVAL, *Une correspondance d'écolâtres du XIᵉ siècle*, in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques*, 36 (1900), p. 487-543.

[92] OTT, *Untersuchungen*, p. 126-347 on Walter of Mortagne, 348-548 on Hugh of St. Victor, 549-657 on Richard of St. Victor.

regard to the needs of students and their parents' [93]. It was this ever-growing diversity in types of letters, each adapted to meet particular circumstances, that kept the professional letter-writers in business — while at the same time reducing them to despair, so that the author of the Saxon *Summa* said that the number of types of missive letters was inestimable.

Both individual letters and collections of letters took on a more personal and self-revelatory tone. While Cassiodorus collected his letters in a frankly self-justifying spirit, the collections of Ratherius and Gerbert have an autobiographical character which led Pivec to call the collection of Gerbert the forerunner of later memoire literature [94]. In particular during the Investiture Controversy, Pivec argued in a later article, the intensification of political feelings helped to heighten the individualistic elements in letters and to create a new and more personal Latin prose style [95]. Schmeidler in his many articles on letter-collections of the eleventh and twelfth centuries also emphasized their stylistic unity and auto-biographical character. A collection written by a single author, he said, and arranged in chronological order presents a real *Lebensbild* of the writer [96]. It is easy to overemphasize this autobiographical element in medieval letter-collections [97], but it corresponded to an important tendency in the culture of the period. As Colin Morris said : 'The rapidly growing popularity of letter-collections is significant in this connection, for, while they served various purposes, an important reason for their preparation was the opportunity which they gave to the writer or his friends to present his character and opinions to the world. Autobiography therefore was not an isolated phenomenon, but part of [a] general tendency to examine, and publish, one's personal experience' [98].

[93] HASKINS, *Studies*, p. 5.

[94] WEIGLE, *Briefsammlung Gerberts*, p. 3; K. PIVEC, *Die Briefsammlung Gerberts von Aurillac*, in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, 49 (1935), p. 68.

[95] PIVEC, *Stil- und Sprachentwicklung*, p. 45-46.

[96] SCHMEIDLER, *Briefsammlungen*, p. 10.

[97] ERDMANN, *Briefliteratur*, p. 9, for instance, called Schmeidler's characterization too broad.

[98] C. MORRIS, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200*. London, 1972. (Church History Outlines, 5), p. 79. On medieval autobiography generally, see G. MISCH, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*. Frankfurt, 1949, and his series of articles on Otloh of St. Emmeram, Guigo of La Chartreuse, Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen, and Suger of St. Denis in the *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, 1954⁵, 1956⁷, and 1957⁴.

Among the most important types of these new and more personal letters were love-letters, of which the earliest known examples in Latin literature date from the second half of the eleventh century and into which was introduced, during the next generation, the note of passion and suffering which subsequently has characterized this type of literature [99]. Even if the most celebrated exchange of love-letters in the Middle Ages, that of Abelard and Heloise, may not be authentic [100], there are other examples of the type, some of them incorporated into general letter-collections [101]. Love-letters in the twelfth century were written in poetry as well as in prose, and the poetic letters of Marbod of Rennes are thought by Bulst to have been a genuine correspondence, perhaps with the nuns of Le Ronceray in Angers [102].

This tendency towards a personalization of style and contents in eleventh- and twelfth-century epistolography was paralleled by a tendency, which was in some respects contradictory, towards formalization, which was represented by the emergence of the discipline known as the *dictamen* or *ars dictandi*, with teachers (*dictatores*), text-books (*artes* or *summae dictaminis*), and collections of model letters (*formularies*). Although *dictamen* now emerged for the first time as a discipline with clearly formulated rules, it had roots deep in the past and was connected in ways which are still not fully understood with the epistolographical rules and traditions which went back to Antiquity. It may be, indeed, as Bresslau conjectured, that handbooks and formularies which are now

[99] SCHALLER, *Probleme*, p. 28.

[100] B. SCHMEIDLER, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Abelard und Heloïse, eine Falschung?*, in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 11 (1913), p. 1-30, and later articles on the same subject in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 54 (1935), p. 323-338, and *Revue bénédictine*, 52 (1940), p. 85-95, in which he argued that the letters were all by Abelard. More recently, J. BENTON, *Fraud, Fiction and Borrowing in the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise*, in *Pierre Abélard-Pierre le Vénérable. Abbaye de Cluny, 2 au 9 juillet 1972.* Paris, 1975. (Colloques internationaux du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 546), p. 469-506, and in other articles to be published soon, has proposed that the letters were forged, perhaps on the basis of some authentic material, in the late thirteenth century. E. KÖNSGEN, *Epistolae duorum amantium : Briefe Abaelards und Heloises?* Leiden and Cologne, 1974. (Mittellateinische Studien und Texte, 8) has published some fragmentary letters, in verse as well as in prose, from a fifteenth-century manuscript at Troyes, but there is no sure evidence of their authorship.

[101] SCHALLER, *Probleme*, p. 35. Cf. also RUHE, *De Amasio*, p. 27-41.

[102] W. BULST, *Liebesbriefgedichte Marbods*, in *Liber Floridus : Mittellateinische Studien Paul Lehmann ... gewidmet.* Ed. B. BISCHOFF and S. BRECHTER. St. Ottilien, 1950, p. 287-301, who compared these with the poetic letters of Baudri of Bourgueil.

lost lay behind those of the eleventh and twelfth centuries [103]. Although *dictamen* was therefore probably not an absolute novelty, it took on a new importance as well as a new form at this time, when, as Curtius said, an effort was made for the first time to subordinate all rhetoric to the teaching on epistolary style to which the name of *dictamen* was given [104].

In the course of the twelfth century the number both of teachers and of text-books of *dictamen* spread rapidly, first in Italy and later, in the second half of the century, north of the Alps [105]. Various schools developed with different styles, as at Bologna and Orléans; and although in the earlier twelfth century a certain number of writers, like St. Bernard and Peter the Venerable, who knew about *dictamen*, did not observe its rules, its influence was all but universal by the end of the century. It even invaded such apparent bastions of literary conservatism as the abbeys of the Cistercian order [106]. This spread in influence of the *dictatores* can also be seen in the increasingly rigid forms of salutation in letters at this time [107]. The influential and prolific writer Peter of Blois, whose letters were read and imitated for centuries, both observed the rules of *dictamen* himself (albeit sometimes rather loosely) and wrote a treatise *De arte dictandi rhetorice* [108].

The two principal aspects of *dictamen* were concerned, respectively, one with the form of the letter and its proper division into parts and the

[103] BRESSLAU, *Handbuch*, vol. 2, p. 247.

[104] CURTIUS, *Europäische Literatur*, p. 82-83. On *dictamen*, see the bibliography cited p. 8 above, to which can be added, for the twelfth century and later, the relevant sections of RUHE, *De Amasio*. The claim of Alberic of Monte Cassino to be 'the first representative of the *ars dictaminis*' has recently been defended, against Schmale, by H. BLOCH, *Monte Cassino's Teachers and Library in the High Middle Ages*, in *La scuola nell'occidente latino dell'alto medioevo*. Spoleto, 1972. (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 19), p. 587-599, with a full bibliography.

[105] BÜTOW, *Entwicklung*, p. 9-10; F.-J. SCHMALE, *Die bologneser Schule der Ars dictandi*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 13.1 (1957), p. 16-34; and, on the spread of *dictamen* north of the Alps, other works cited in PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 31-32.

[106] C. V. LANGLOIS, *Formulaires de lettres du XIIe, du XIIIe et du XIVe siècles* [5], in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques*, 35.2 (1896), p. 413-414; S. J. HEATHCOTE, *The Letter Collection Attributed to Master Transmundus, Papal Notary and Monk of Clairvaux, in the Late Twelfth Century*, in *Analecta Cisterciensia*, 21 (1965), p. 35-111 and 167-238.

[107] SCHMALE, *Bologneser Schule*, p. 27, n. 34. Cf. also the forthcoming article, cited n. 32 above, on the arrangement of names in epistolary salutations.

[108] Ms. Cambridge, University Library, Dd IX 38, f. 115r-121r. Cf. R. W. SOUTHERN, *Peter of Blois : A Twelfth Century Humanist?*, in *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*. Oxford, 1970, p. 115.

other with the choice of correct words and their arrangement into a dignified and elegant style. This second aspect was known as the *cursus* and was invented, according to the celebrated thirteenth-century *dictator* Pontius of Provence 'in order that the *clausula* and the entire letter might be presented more suitably and more handsomely '[109]. It was related both to the ancient rules governing the endings of phrases and sentences (see p. 28-30 above) and to the more general traditions of rhymed and rhythmical prose, but very little is known about its emergence and its influence on specific writers. The letters of Henry IV, for instance, show a greater use of rhymed prose than his charters but apparently no sign of the *cursus* [110]. Peter Damiani, on the other hand, was clearly familiar with the *cursus*, since no less than 98% of the *clausulae* in his letters fit the patterns later classified as *planus*, *tardus*, and *velox*, whereas in the letters of Gregory VII only 56.5 % of the *clausulae* fit these patterns [111]. Yet it was in the papal chancery, where the *cursus* was introduced apparently by John of Gaeta, later Pope Gelasius II (1118-19), that it later became *de rigeur* and in the late twelfth century was even considered by some to be a secret of the papal scribes [112]. By this time its influence had spread, through the teaching of the *dictatores* and in several different forms, throughout Europe; and in the thirteenth century and later some degree of regard for the rules of the *cursus* may be considered a hallmark of authenticity for letters drawn up in the papal or other professional chanceries.

It is probable that the growing technical complexity of epistolography was one of the factors contributing to its decline in the thirteenth century, as also may the tendency to authenticate all documents with a seal or signature, which marked the end of the earlier more flexible and partially oral tradition of epistolography. Letters were still written at that time, probably in as great or even greater numbers than before,

---

[109] C. THUROT, *Notices et extraits de divers manuscrits latins pour servir à l'histoire des doctrines grammaticales au moyen âge*, in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque impériale*, 22.2 (1868), p. 481. Cf. N. VALOIS, *Étude sur le rythme des bulles pontificales*, in *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 42 (1881), p. 181. Valois more or less rediscovered the discipline of the *cursus*, of which all knowledge had been lost after the Middle Ages, and this article, in spite of its age, is still perhaps the most lucid single account. Other works are cited in PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol.2, p. 30, n. 129.

[110] ERDMANN, *Untersuchungen*, p. 207.

[111] LINDHOLM, *Studien*, p. 10.

[112] See the treatise of Peter of Blois cited n. 108 above.

---

but their composition was increasingly the work of professional letter-writers, and they lacked the variety and personal quality of the previous age [113]. In the hands of all but a few of the greatest *dictatores*, epistolary style and content became both degraded and mechanical. The fashion for collecting letters also declined in the thirteenth century, and the best-known collections from this period are those of administrators like Grosseteste and professional letter-writers like Thomas of Capua, Petrus de Vinea, and Berardus of Naples [114]. The *Liber epistolaris* of Richard of Bury, which was compiled in 1324-25, included no letters of his own and was the work of a rising young administrator and writer who wanted it as a practical aid in his work [115].

It is possible that letters had become almost too much of a good thing in the twelfth century and that the fashion for writing letters brought its own reaction, especially among monks, who had been among the most ardent practitioners of the art. 'If you could fully know ...', wrote Robert of Bridlington in about 1150, 'what great evils there are ... that have been brought about for religious churches and monasteries ... through secret letters being mutually given and received, you would definitely be of [the] opinion that it was not for nothing that blessed Augustine ... so earnestly forbade his brethren to receive secret letters either from one of their own number, or from someone outside' [116]. The writing and receiving of letters was clearly a potential threat to religious seclusion, and its condemnation by many monastic and canonical reform-

---

[113] Cf. VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 28-29; LANGLOIS, *Lettres*, p. 535; A. MOREY and C. N. L. BROOKE, *Gilbert Foliot and his Letters*. Cambridge, 1965. (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, N. S., 11), p. 9.

[114] L. DELISLE, *Notice sur cinq manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et sur un manuscrit de la bibliothèque de Bordeaux contenant des recueils épistolaires de Bérard de Naples*, in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques*, 27.2 (1877), p. 87-167; S. H. THOMSON, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln 1235-1253*. Cambridge, 1940, p. 192-213; H. M. SCHALLER, *Zur Entstehung der sogenannten Briefsammlung des Petrus de Vinea*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 12 (1956), p. 114-159, and *Studien zur Briefsammlung des Kardinals Thomas von Capua, ibid.*, 21 (1965), p. 371-518.

[115] N. DENHOLM-YOUNG, *The Liber Epistolaris of Richard de Bury*. Oxford, 1950, which the editor described in the preface as 'more of a formulary than a "letter-book"' (p. XI) and as 'an unofficial formulary of Latin letters' (p. XXV). The earliest go back to the middle of the twelfth century (p. LV).

[116] *The Bridlington Dialogue*. London, 1960, p. 145a.

ers in the twelfth century and later may have contributed to drying up what had previously been a fertile source of letters [117].

Finally, the decline of Latin and the spread of the vernacular languages doubtless also contributed to bringing the great age of medieval epistolography to an end. In the thirteenth century, as Le Clerc said, 'Almost all these Latin letters were drawn up by ecclesiastical secretaries' [118], and even highly educated clerics increasingly left the composition of their letters to secretaries trained in the art of writing in Latin. To some extent this had always been true [119], but in the late Middle Ages the circle of people who could read and write letters in Latin became increasingly restricted. The same period saw the growth of vernacular letters [120], of which the earliest example in French dates from 1238 [121]. Some of these, such as the well-known crusading letter of Jean Sarrasin written in 1249, show such close parallels with contemporary Latin letters as to raise the suspicion that they are simply vernacular versions [122], and in later formularies it was common to present both Latin and vernacular forms, for different recipients, of the same letter [123]. Here, too, therefore, can be found a sign of the depersonalization and mechanization of letter-writing at this time.

[117] In addition to the sources cited in PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 1, n. 2, see VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 17, and J. HOURLIER, *L'âge classique (1140-1378)* : *Les religieux*. Paris, 1974. (Histoire du droit et des institutions de l'Église en Occident, 10), p. 217, n. 9.

[118] V. LE CLERC, *Lettres* [in the thirteenth century], in *Histoire littéraire de la France*. Vol. 21, Paris, 1847, p. 780.

[119] See p. 42-46 below.

[120] Cf. *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, 6 : *La littérature didactique, allégorique et satirique*. Ed. H. R. JAUSS. Heidelberg, 1968-72, vol. 1, p. 96-98, and vol. 2, p. 143-146 (nos. 2788-2848), discussing the letters (among others) of Guittone d'Arezzo, Guiraut Riquier, and Brunetto Latini. The language but not the character of these letters differed from those in Latin. Of Guittone's letters the editor said : 'Destinataires privés, mais intention de diffusion édifiante'. On letters in German, see STEINHAUSEN, *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes*, vol. 1, p. 20, dating the origins of the general vernacular *Briefsverkehr* from the mid-fourteenth century, and *Deutsche Privatbriefe*, in which all but thirty letters date from 1400 and after.

[121] FOULET, *Lettres françaises*, p. v, listing the eleven known letters in French from before 1260.

[122] *Ibid.*, p. VII.

[123] BURDACH, *Schlesisch-böhmische Briefmuster*, p. 28-29.

4. LATE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

The final period of medieval epistolography lasted from about the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, during which the art of letter-writing was actively cultivated not only by the humanists but also, once again, by other types of writers. Epistolography was 'perhaps the most extensive branch of humanist literature', according to Kristeller, who went on to say that at that time, 'The formal letter, edited and collected for publication, is not merely a personal document, but also the carrier of news and often the medium of short literary expression for scholarly or philosophical subjects' [124]. The letter as a genre thus resumed the central position in literary culture that it had occupied in the early Middle Ages and had lost in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Many thousands of letters were written and collected at this time, and it has been estimated that between three and four hundred editions of letters were published before 1580 [125].

This revival was not simply a result, as is sometimes said, of the humanists' interest in classical literature and style, and still less of Petrarch's famous rediscovery of the letters of Cicero, which was an event of personal rather than general significance [126]. The humanists certainly brought to their letter-writing a higher level of learning and Latinity than their immediate predecessors, but in other respects they were 'the successors of the medieval *dictatores*', as Kristeller put it, and they drew on the traditions of the associated arts of letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*) and of public speaking (*ars arengandi*), both of which occupied a central position in the public life of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance [127].

[124] P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Contribution of Religious Orders to Renaissance Thought and Learning*, in *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning*. Ed. E. MAHONEY. Durham (N.C.), 1974. (Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1), p. 109.

[125] BUTLER, *Gentlest Art*, p. 1.

[126] Cf. MESNARD, *Commerce épistolaire*, p. 20-21; GERLO, *The Opus*, p. 104 : 'The rediscovery of the correspondence of Cicero and the younger Pliny between 1345 and 1419 gave birth to a genre that was wholly independent of the existing tradition'. There are several articles on humanist letter-writers, including Ambrogio Traversari, Gasparinus Barzizza, and Cincius Romanus, in L. BERTALOT, *Studien zum italienischen und deutschen Humanismus*. Ed. P. O. KRISTELLER. Rome, 1975. (Storia e letteratura, 129-130). For an interesting North European humanist manuscript compiled about 1470 and containing various letters and works on letter-writing, see G. G. MEERSSEMAN, *La raccolta dell'umanista fiammingo Giovanni de Veris 'De arte epistolandi'*, in *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 15 (1972), p. 215-281.

[127] P. O. KRISTELLER, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*. Stanford, 1964, p. 161, and *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 24-28.

The practice of writing treatises on the art of letter-writing continued throughout this period, and was not spurned by the humanists. No less a figure than Erasmus not only was a great letter-writer himself but also wrote two works on the writing of letters, in which he catalogued the various types of letters and criticized what he regarded as the overly rigid precepts of the older manuals of which the rules, he thought, were being observed in too many letters. He himself particularly admired the letters of Cicero, Pliny, and Politian [128].

The humanists therefore contributed a new content and style to their letters but in other respects remained within the framework of traditional epistolography. It was the letter-writers who were dealing with more everyday affairs who for the first time really broke out of this framework and created the type of intimate vernacular private letter that is familiar today. Not many of these have survived, but the great collections of letters from members of the Stonor and Paston families in England represent a type of letter-writing entirely different from that of literary letters, and they provide a clearer insight into the real workings of society and family in the fifteenth century than all the humanist letters put together [129]. Letters of spiritual advice, many of which were addressed to laymen, were also increasingly written in the vernacular [130]. All the letters of St. Catherine of Siena, for instance, are in the vernacular, and many of them are truncated in the form they have come down, omitting the sections on practical affairs and leaving only the more spiritual parts [131].

Humanist letter-writing therefore represents only a part — and in some respects a rather conservative part — of the total epistolography

---

[128] See the two articles by GERLO cited above.

[129] C. L. KINGSFORD, *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*. London, 1919. (Camden Society, 3rd S., 29-30), 2 vol.; N. DAVIS, *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*. Vol. 1, Oxford, 1971. Cf. H. S. BENNETT, *The Pastons and their England*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, 1932, p. 114-127 on letters and letter-writing. The letters of a commercial family have recently been re-edited by A. HANHAM, *The Cely Letters 1472-1488*. London and New York and Toronto, 1975. (Early English Text Society, 273). Selections from these and other English correspondences of the fifteenth century are found in LYELL, *Mediaeval Post-Bag*.

[130] G. HASENOHR-ESNOS, *Un recueil inédit de lettres de direction spirituelle du XVe siècle : le manuscrit Vat. lat. 11259 de la Bibliothèque Vaticane*, in *École française de Rome : Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 82 (1970), p. 401-500.

[131] R. FAWTIER, *Sainte Catherine de Sienne : Essai de critique des sources*. Vol. 2, Paris, 1930. (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 135).

---

of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The humanists clung to Latin long after it had been given up by most writers. Almost all the great humanist letter-writers, from Petrarch to Erasmus, wrote in Latin. They finally overcame their prejudice against the vernacular, according to Neubert, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century in Italy and somewhat later north of the Alps, or, according to Ferrero, not until the second quarter of the sixteenth century even in Italy, and then in part owing to the publication by Aretino in 1538 of his vernacular letters [132]. There is evidence, however, that long before this time some letters drawn up and sent in Latin were actually written by secretaries on the basis of instructions given in the vernacular by the ostensible author of the letter [133]. Cardinal Giacomo Ammannati, for instance, whose unpublished letter-collection has recently been studied, clearly regarded the vernacular as suitable only for unexalted persons and subjects but sometimes gave a vernacular outline of an important letter which was then written in Latin by a secretary [134]. Such cases raise special problems for the critic and editor and emphasize the complexity of the evolution within the broader genre of letter-writing.

The spread of literacy in the sixteenth century and with it the full growth of vernacular letters may be said to mark the end of the tradition of medieval epistolography, which went back to Antiquity. Many of the forms of medieval letter-writing lived on, and are not entirely dead today. Professional letter-writers are still found in some parts of the world, but their trade is a pale reflection of the art of the *dictatores* as it was practiced at its height. Their effort to formulate the rules of letter-writing and to define and classify the various types of letters was probably the greatest single contribution of the Middle Ages to the evolution of the epistolary genre. No less important in the long run, however, was the personalization of style and contents which emerged as an ideal in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and which later combined with the use of the vernacular to mark the emergence of the modern type of letter.

---

[132] NEUBERT, *Einführung*, p. 73; FERRERO, *Lettere*, p. 12-13. According to MARTI, *L'epistolario*, p. 205, the Cinquecento was the Golden Age of the vernacular *epistolari*.

[133] DENHOLM-YOUNG, *Liber Epistolaris*, p. XXVI-XXVII, where he discusses letters drawn up in Latin on the basis of vernacular instructions and concludes that, 'There seems to be ground here for the suggestion that a letter in "special form" is one in which the phraseology was left to the discretion of the clerk who wrote it'.

[134] F. R. HAUSMANN, *Die Briefsammlung des Kardinals Giacomo Ammannati und ihre Bedeutung fuer die humanistische Briefliteratur des Quattrocento*, in *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 20 (1971), p. 31.

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF LETTERS

Each stage in the development of a medieval letter from its inception in the mind of the author to the form in which it was preserved for the future poses problems for the historian using it as a source. They will be considered here under the four headings of production, composition, transmission, and preservation.

1. PRODUCTION

A) *Dictation*

The text of most letters both in Antiquity and the Middle Ages originated in the form of dictation (of either an abstract or the complete text) by the author to a secretary or scribe. The three steps of putting ideas into words (*componere*), speaking them out loud (*dicere* or *dictare*), and writing them down (*scribere*) were clearly distinguished in theory. Although a growing confusion between the first two, even in the classical period, put the meaning of *dictare* somewhat in debate, it was always distinct from the physical process of writing [135]. Writing was hard work and was considered by many to be incompatible with the intellectual effort required of authors, few of whom, even if they had the necessary skill, had the time to prepare the tablets, papyrus, or parchment, and the pens and ink needed to write a letter [136]. The Church Fathers rarely if ever wrote their letters with their own hand, according to Dekkers and Hagendahl, who concluded that Augustine, Jerome, and their contemporaries almost invariably dictated their letters to a stenographer [137].

---

[135] A. ERNOUT, *Dictare « Dicter »*, *allem. Dichten*, in *Revue des études latines*, 29 (1951), p. 155-161.

[136] On the physical aspects of letter-writing, see especially W. WATTENBACH, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*. 3rd ed. Leipzig, 1896; L. SANTIFALLER, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Schreibstoffe im Mittelalter*. Vol. 1, Graz and Cologne, 1953. (Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung. Ergänzungsband 16.1).

[137] DEKKERS, *Autographes*, p. 127-128; H. HAGENDAHL, *Die Bedeutung der Stenographie für die spätlateinischen christliche Literatur*, in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 14 (1971), p. 34-35. See on Augustine, DE BRUYNE, *Notes*, p. 524-526, and on Jerome, ARNS, *Technique*, p. 37-51. ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 17-18, was of the opinion that dictation tended to replace the earlier practice of writing by oneself in the early centuries A.D.

Even on those rare occasions when an author wrote a letter himself, the distinction between *dictare* and *scribere* was preserved and he was said to write to his own dictation [138].

The term *dictare* was regularly applied to letters in Merovingian and Carolingian times; and although its meaning is not always clear, the many references to the dictation of letters by the Holy Spirit or by love, piety, or reason — *dictante spiritu sancto, caritate dictante, dictante pietate, ipsa ratio dic[t]at* — show that it meant the process of composition and dictation, of speaking to the scribe through the author, rather than the actual writing [139]. Not really until the eleventh and twelfth centuries was there a tendency for some authors to combine the senses [140], and then partly owing to the influence of the *dictatores*, who as professional letter-writers combined the functions of author and scribe. *Dictare* thus came to mean the joint processes of composing, drawing up, and writing a work. As Leclercq said, 'A person often wrote, as he read, out loud; the author thus dictated to himself what he wrote : he pronounced it to himself at the same time his hand wrote the graphic signs' [141]. But the old distinction was not entirely forgotten. The early twelfth-century *dictator* Henry *Francigena* (who in spite of his name taught at Pavia) defined *dictare* as 'to express the perception of the spirit in the proper construction of reasons' [142], and many writers continued to separate composing from writing in theory if not in fact, and even to attribute them to different human faculties. Thus St. Bernard wrote to the canon Olger : 'Let the wits have a rest from dictating, the lips from speaking, the fingers from writing, [and] the messengers from running' [143].

The majority of letters at this time were still dictated to secretaries

---

[138] Cf. ARNS, *Technique*, p. 37-39. Ambrose may have written some of his own letters, according to HAGENDAHL, *Bedeutung*, p. 35, and Symmachus is known to have written at least one letter himself (ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 332, n. 115).

[139] *MGH, Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi*, vol. 5, p. 245 (Amalarius of Metz, Ep. 4), p. 352 (Jonas of Orléans, Ep. to King Pepin), p. 366 (Amulo of Lyons, Ep. 1), and p. 632 (Prudentius of Troyes, Ep. to Wenilo of Sens).

[140] WATTENBACH, *Schriftwesen*, p. 71 and 458-459.

[141] BÜTOW, *Entwicklung*, p. 48.

[142] J. LECLERCQ, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu : Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age*. Paris, 1957, p. 166.

[143] BERNARD, Ep. 90. Ed. J. MABILLON, *Sancti Bernardi ... opera omnia*. Paris, 1839, vol. 1.1, col. 263-264. Cf. WATTENBACH, *Schriftwesen*, p. 71 and 459 for references to dictation and writing by the same person; also PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, 18, and the letter of Hugh of Prémontré cited p. 61 below.

either as abstracts or as complete texts [144]. Bernard on one occasion wrote to Peter the Venerable in apology for a harsh-worded letter that, 'The mass of my work is to blame, because when my scribes do not remember my meaning properly, they sharpen their pens beyond measure, and I am unable to see what I ordered to be written' [145]. In a few letters Bernard specifically referred to his having dictated the letter himself as a sign of authenticity [146], which some scholars have taken to mean that the letter was written in his own hand but which more probably meant that he had dictated the entire text, which would therefore have been recognizable from its style rather than its script [147]. The practice of writing in one's own hand may have grown in the late Middle Ages. Giacomo Ammannati clearly regarded an autograph letter as superior to one written by a secretary [148], but the majority of his letters, like those of his contemporaries, were still dictated.

B) *Preparation*

After dictating the letter, the author (unless he was his own scribe) more or less stepped out of the picture until it had been prepared in its final form [149]. Comparatively little is known about this process owing to the extreme rarity of original letters. Very simple notes may have been taken down directly by the scribe in their final form. The early monastic letters of which the originals were discovered in Egypt, for instance, and of which three-quarters are on fragments of pottery, may have been written directly, even by the writer, but they are all concerned with everyday affairs and are much shorter and less elaborate than the letters on spiritual matters that have survived only in copies [150]. The majority of literary letters in both Antiquity and the Middle Ages were first taken down

on tablets covered with wax [151]. A good description of these tablets is found in some of the poetic epistles of Baudri of Bourgueil in the twelfth century, who described his tablets as being covered with green or yellow wax and enclosed in an embroidered bag and as containing eight verses each [152]. The tablets themselves were occasionally sent as letters [153], but as a rule a copy on parchment was made by a scribe, and Baudri described himself as waiting impatiently for the return of his tablets, without which he could not write [154].

The form of the dictation probably varied, with regard both to whether it was in a full text or an abstract and to whether it was taken down in full, in an abbreviated form, or in shorthand. When the tablets were themselves sent as the letter, the text obviously had to be written out fully (unless the recipient knew shorthand), but this was certainly unusual, and Hagendahl is probably correct in his assumption that dictation was normally to a stenographer who took it down in shorthand. The text then had to be copied out, onto either papyrus or parchment, of which the respective use probably varied from time to time and place to place [155]. Jerome, for instance, clearly regarded papyrus as the normal material for letters, with parchment as a possible substitute, whereas Augustine preferred parchment [156]. Papyrus probably prevailed in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages and was replaced by parchment after the decline of Mediterranean trade made papyrus hard to obtain. The work of writing on either material was slow and tedious and was therefore usually entrusted to a scribe [157].

These processes offered many chances for textual corruption, which is why they need to be known to the historian. As De Ghellinck said : 'There are two stages to be crossed between the dictation by the author

[144] VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 11-19; HASKINS, *Studies*, p. 2; and, on the thirteenth century, LE CLERC, *Lettres*, p. 780.

[145] BERNARD, Ep. 387. Ed. MABILLON, vol. 1.1, col. 694.

[146] BERNARD, Ep. 304, 307, 310. Ed. MABILLON, vol. 1.1, col. 587, 591, 595.

[147] Cf. BERNARD, Ep. 402. Ed. MABILLON, vol. 1.1, col. 179. Cf. A. H. BREDERO, *Études sur la « Vita prima » de saint Bernard*. Rome, 1960, p. 110; HOFFMANN, *Zur mittelalterlichen Brieftechnik*, p. 163-164; J. LECLERCQ, *Recherches sur la collection des épîtres de saint Bernard*, in *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 14 (1971), p. 209, n. 31.

[148] HAUSMANN, *Briefsammlung*, p. 31.

[149] Cf. generally VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 3-10.

[150] H. E. WINLOCK and W. E. CRUM, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*. New York, 1926. (Metropolitan Museum of Art : Egyptian Expedition), p. vol. 1, 186-195.

[151] WATTENBACH, *Schriftwesen*, p. 51-89; K. K. HULLEY, *Light Cast by St. Jerome on Certain Palaeographical Points*, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 54 (1943), p. 86-88.

[152] P. ABRAHAMS. *Les oeuvres poétiques de Baudri de Bourgueil (1046-1130)*. Paris, 1926, p. 53-54 (Ep. 47); cf. also 264-265 (Ep. 206), 267-268 (Ep. 210), and 333-335 (Ep. 234). Baudri both wrote on the tablets himself and used a scribe.

[153] *Ibid.*, p. 161-162 (Ep. 167).

[154] *Ibid.*, p. 51-52 (Ep. 44).

[155] WATTENBACH, *Schriftwesen*, p. 96-111; H. LECLERCQ, *Lettres chrétiennes*, col. 2884; ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 35-37.

[156] HULLEY, *Light Cast by St. Jerome*, p. 83-86; ARNS, *Technique*, p. 21.

[157] ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 5-14 (especially p. 9); WIKENHAUSER, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 347; DEKKERS, *Autographes*, p. 131.

and the text as it is transmitted to us : first, the passage from the ear to the hand of the tachygraphers... then, the second stage, from the eye to the hand of the scribes, who reconstituted the tachygraphy into ordinary writing, and, finally, the passage from the eye or the ear to the hand of the calligraphers, who definitively transcribed the copy, and thus the risks of textual corruptions were multiplied' [158]. Only after the final copy was made did the author see it again, and not always then, to judge from the example of St. Bernard; and by that time it was usually too late to make any serious changes. Some evidence of additions may however be found in the puzzling phrases beginning *et alia manu* which are found in about a dozen of the letters of St. Augustine and which probably represent his autograph subscriptions made 'in another hand' after the letter had been prepared by a secretary [159].

C) *Authentication*

The final stage in the production of a letter was the authentication [160]. Since letters were usually in the writing, and sometimes actually in the words, of a secretary, it is clear that neither the script nor the style were reliable proofs of authenticity, and from the earliest times authors relied principally on subscriptions and seals, though they also made use of special signs and pictures, secret writing, and private references or allusions, known only to the correspondents, which were called *signa* or *intersigna* in the twelfth century.

When an author knew how to write, and his writing was known to the correspondent, the subscription (like the signature today) was the easiest way to authenticate a letter. The *et alia manu* phrases, mentioned above, in the letters of St. Augustine served this purpose, according to Dekkers, who said that, 'This autograph salutation or recommendation took the place of a signature and served to assure the authenticity of the letter' [161]. Later subscriptions on letters, as on charters, were often not in the autograph of the subscriber; but there are examples of subscriptions in the author's own hand throughout the Middle Ages.

[158] DE GHELLINCK, *Patristique*, vol. 2, p. 217. On the normal process of copying, and the risks involved, see A. DAIN, *Les manuscrits*. 2nd ed. Paris, 1964, p. 40-46.

[159] DE BRUYNE, *Notes*, p. 524-526; H. LECLERCQ, *Lettres chrétiennes*, col. 2838, 2847. Cf. DEKKERS, *Autographes*, p. 128-131.

[160] Cf. HOFFMANN, *Zur mittelalterlichen Brieftechnik*, who goes down to 1200 and from which many of the details in this paragraph are drawn.

[161] DEKKERS, *Autographes*, p. 128.

The most common form of authenticating medieval letters, however, was by sealing, and many letter-writers, especially in the late Middle Ages, used for their letters a special seal different from that used on public instruments. Sealing could be done in such a way as either to seal the letter closed (folding it and attaching the seal so that it had to be broken before the letter could be read) or to leave the letter open or patent (in which case the seal was appended or attached in some way to the face of the letter, which could be read without breaking the seal). It is generally assumed that medieval letters were mostly sent closed [162], and this is confirmed by the evidence of the majority of surviving original letters, which show signs of having been folded and then punched with holes or slits through which a string or piece of parchment was threaded and then sealed [163]. Of the thirty-one letters of the mid-twelfth century in the capitulary archive of S. Ambrogio at Milan, all were folded into small, fat rectangles, and although only eleven are punched with holes, the others may have been tied around with a sealed string [164]. The letter seal of Henry of Glinde bears an inscription — 'Accipe frange lege claude repone tege' — clearly showing that it had to be broken before the letter could be read [165]. Some letters were sent open or patent, however. The earliest surviving missive letter of the Capetian kings, for instance, which can be dated probably in 1146, was sealed *sur simple queue* (that is, on a strip of parchment cut but not detached from the bottom of the letter) and shows no sign of having been closed [166], and while this may be considered more or less official in character, it is pro-

[162] Cf. WATTENBACH, *Schriftwesen*, p. 201 ('Im Abendlande wissen wir nur von Briefen auf gefaltetem Pergament'.); GIRY, *Manuel*, p. 751.

[163] L. SCHMITZ, *Zwei Original-Briefe von c. 1188*, in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 24 (1903), p. 351-352; ERDMANN, *Untersuchungen*, p. 184-195.

[164] Milan, Capitulary Archive of Sant'Ambrogio, portfolio Seculo XII, 1181-1200. Cf. W. WACHE, *Eine Sammlung von Originalbriefen des 12. Jahrhunderts im Kapitelarchiv von S. Ambrogio in Mailand*, in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, 50 (1936), p. 261-333, who is principally concerned with the contents rather than the form of the letters.

[165] E. KITTEL, H. BEUMANN, and C. ERDMANN, *Das Briefsiegel Heinrichs von Glinde*, in *Deutsches Archiv*, 3 (1939), p. 413-429, especially 424-429, by ERDMANN, on 'Die Briefsiegel des hohen Mittelalters'.

[166] C. HIGOUNET, *Une lettre missive originale de Louis VII*, in *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 119 (1961), p. 241-243, stressing that this letter disproves the view that the earliest missive letters were sent closed.

bable that in practice missive letters were sent both open and closed [167].

Sometimes an author relied on his style as a proof of authenticity, either because his seal was not to hand, as with the letters of St. Bernard mentioned above [168], or because the matter was so secret or so compromising to the writer that he hesitated to attach his name or seal. Thus Petrarch at the end of one of his letters *Sine nomine* said that, 'I have put neither my hand nor ring nor place nor time to this letter. You know where I am, and you recognize the voice of the speaker'; and in another he said that he had omitted his name judging that his style alone would suffice [169]. Frequently, however, important messages were omitted altogether from letters and entrusted to the mouth of the messenger, for whom the letter served in effect as an introduction, leaving the historian in frustrated ignorance of its real purpose [170].

In spite of these safeguards for authenticity and confidentiality, forged letters were by no means unknown in the Middle Ages, though less common than forged charters. 'I am in peril from false brethren', wrote St. Bernard to the pope in 1151, citing I Cor. 11.26, 'and many forged letters under my forged seal have come into the hands of many men. ... I have therefore thrown away that [old seal] and am now using a new one, as you see, with both my image and my name' [171]. For a busy man, who could not write or even read over all his letters, the unauthorized or incautious use of his seal was often as great a danger as outright forgery, and the historian must be on guard lest even a fully authenticated letter may not express the true sentiments of the author.

---

[167] VALOIS, *De arte*, p. 8-11; HÖDL, *Admonter Briefsammlung*, p. 377-378. Bernard commented on the difference between open and closed letters in Ep. 223 (Ed. MABIL-LON, vol. 1.1, p. 455) : 'Clausam habetis epistolam, qui de priore aperta male suspicatus estis. Nam ego quidem nihil in hoc aliud cogitavi, nisi quod ad diversos scribentem necesse est, iuxta consuetudinem, epistolam cera non claudere'. Heloise asked Peter the Venerable to send the absolution of Abelard (which had apparently first been sent in a closed letter, of which the seal was broken) in an open letter to be placed on his tomb : PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 401-402 (Ep. 168).

[168] See p. 44 above.

[169] P. PIUR, *Petrarcas 'Buch ohne Namen' und die päpstliche Kurie*. Halle S. 1925. (Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte : Buchreihe, 6), p. 181 (Ep. 4) and 204 (Ep. 11).

[170] PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 25-26.

[171] BERNARD, Ep. 284. Ed. MABILLON, vol. 1.1, p. 569-570.

2. COMPOSITION

A) *Authorship and Style*

Enough has been said about the way in which a letter was written to show that serious questions can be raised about the authorship. If only the outline of a letter was dictated, sometimes in the vernacular, to a scribe or secretary who wrote the letter in his own words and script, or even more if a colleague or secretary wrote a letter entirely in the name of someone else, who can be properly called the author? It was common practice in the Middle Ages, as in Antiquity, not only for secretaries and professional letter-writers but for any writer with a reputation for composing persuasive letters to be asked to write letters for other people [172]. In many letter-collections, therefore, as Schmeidler stressed, the letters seemingly by many different authors are often in fact the work of a single *dictator* [173]. Almost half the letters in the collection of Nicholas of Montiéramey, who fell into disgrace with St. Bernard precisely for fabricating (or, more likely, imitating) his letters, were written in the name of another person [174]. And Bernard himself did likewise, since forty-five of the letters in his first collection were written for others [175]. Such letters were certainly authentic by contemporary standards and real in the sense that they were intended to be sent, but they were not written by their apparent authors, and their real authorship would be unknown if they had become separated from the collection.

The problem is even more acute in the case of fictional letters, most of which are by their nature anonymous. Many fictional letters circulated under the names of divine, mythological, or deceased persons, and of real people to whom they were fictitiously attributed, like the famous crusading letters from the Emperor Alexius to Count Robert of Flanders [176]. Others were written as model-letters or in order to lend verisimilitude to historical and other works, such as the letters found in the work of Widukind [177]. These letters were certainly not forgeries

---

[172] PETER, *Brief*, p. 168-177.

[173] B. SCHMEIDLER, *Über die Tegernseer Briefsammlung (Froumund)*, in *Neues Archiv*, 46 (1925-26), p. 428-429.

[174] PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 329.

[175] LECLERCQ, *Recherches*, p. 206-207.

[176] HAGENMEYER, *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, p. 10-44, 129-136, and 185-209.

[177] A. NÜRNBERGER, *Die Glaubwürdigkeit der bei Widukind überlieferten Briefe*, in *Quellenstudien aus dem historischen Seminar der Universität Innsbruck*, 5² (1913), p. 55-85, who concluded (p. 73) that the letters were 'nur ein Kunstmittel Widukinds'.

in the usual sense of the term and might indeed have been accepted by contemporaries as authentic, but they had no connection with their ostensible writers. That a letter was included in a formulary or used as a model, however, is in itself no proof that it is fictional in character, since many real letters were used in this way, though often with changed or abbreviated names and addresses.

In all these cases the historian should exercise caution in attributing the authorship of a letter, or the views expressed in it, to the individual or individuals named in the address and should take account of the context of the letter as well as its contents and its style. In writings such as letters, style alone is not a reliable guide to authorship, as several scholars have warned. For classical and early Christian letters which were written by secretaries, Roller stressed that, 'In such letters style can no longer serve as a sign of authenticity' [178]. St. Bernard discovered this to his grief (see p. 48 above), and even today some of the works of Nicholas of Montiéramey, who was clearly an accomplished mimic, are not easy to distinguish from those of Bernard and other writers [179]. As Fawtier pointed out in his study of the letters of St. Catherine of Siena, who seems to have dictated all her letters to a variety of scribes, 'It is not impossible to imitate the style of the greatest writers' [180].

B) *Form and Language*

Even when the authorship of a letter is not in doubt, allowance has to be made in evaluating its historical worth both for stylistic conventions and for common forms. These have been discussed above in the chapter on evolution, since their character and influence varied at different times in the Middle Ages, and a great deal of research still needs to be done (along the lines of Zielinski's statistical study of the *clausulae* in Cicero's speeches and Polheim's investigation of Latin rhymed prose down to the twelfth century) in order to establish the precise extent to which any individual letter was written under the influence of established stylistic norms [181].

---

[178] ROLLER, *Formular*, p. 19. Cf. WIKENHAUSER, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 348.

[179] PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 328-329.

[180] FAWTIER, *Ste Catherine*, vol. 2, p. 319-320; cf. p. 10 and 27-28.

[181] T. ZIELINSKI, *Das Clauselgesetz in Ciceros Reden.* Leipzig, 1904; POLHEIM, *Reimprosa.* Cf. SILVESTRE, *Comment on rédigeait une lettre*, for a detailed study of a single letter.

The patterns of the *clausulae* in late Antique and Patristic letters, the traditions of rhymed and rhythmical prose in the early Middle Ages, and the full-blown emergence of the *cursus* in the twelfth-century as a discipline with definite rules all promoted the tendency, which appeared in the thirteenth century, for letter-writing to become the task of professionals who had been trained in the necessary rhythmical patterns. The form of letters may also have been subject to certain restraints in the early Middle Ages, but these also emerged as clearly-formulated rules only in the twelfth century, after which a letter could be judged in terms of the degree to which it conformed to the standards of the *ars dictaminis*.

The precise influence of these rules is uncertain. In the nature of things, many of the letters that followed the precepts of the *dictatores* or followed model letters were of little intrinsic or stylistic interest and have therefore perished. Many letters which have been preserved, on the other hand, show considerable freedom in form and style, in part, perhaps, because many of them are by notable writers who did not feel constrained by, or who even consciously rejected, the rules of *dictamen*. Its broad effect, however, even on humanist epistolography, was certainly considerable, and its influence on any individual letter must be assessed before it can be discounted.

C) *Revision*

The text of a letter was liable to revision at any stage in its history from the original dictation up to its incorporation into the final collection or other form where it could rest secure from the hands of would-be improvers. These included not only the author but also scribes, secretaries, and even the recipients of letters, who were considered to own the texts of letters sent to them (see p. 16 above) and were sometimes asked by the author to make changes in the text [182].

Almost more than with any other type of medieval literature, as Pasquali has emphasized, the way in which letters were sent out, copied, and collected was particularly favorable to the formation and preservation of author's variants. 'It was customary', he said, 'to publish letters not as they were sent but corrected and reworked. ... Like Cicero,

---

[182] H. ZATSCHEK, *Wibald von Stablo : Studien zur Geschichte der Reichskanzlei und Reichspolitik unter den älteren Staufern*, in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungsband 10 (1928), p. 312; CLASSEN, *Aus der Werkstatt Gerhochs*, p. 74-80.

Symmachus, and Ennodius, Petrarch continued to work methodically on his own letters ... even when the original had been in the hands of the addressee for a long time' [183]. There is abundant evidence that it was more or less standard practice for authors whose letters were collected either by themselves or by others during their lifetimes to revise the texts, sometimes more than once [184]. Many of these changes were primarily stylistic in character, designed to put a point more clearly or elegantly, but they often also affected the sense and sometimes drastically changed the meaning of the text in the light of events which occurred after it was first written [185]. Revisions sometimes continued to be made after the author's death, as with the letters of St. Catherine of Siena, which were extensively revised with a eye both to leaving out material thought to be of passing interest and also, perhaps, to promoting her canonization [186].

The reader of medieval letters should therefore try to distinguish the various versions of the text, each of which may be of interest and to a certain extent valid. Who is to say whether the original dictation, the fair copy approved by the author, or a subsequent revised version is the more authentic? Even scribal changes, or those made by the recipient, may be important if they were made with the knowledge and consent of the author.

3. TRANSMISSION

A) *Carriage*

The carriage and delivery of letters in the Middle Ages likewise involved special problems which may affect their value to historians [187]. Reliable

---

[183] G. PASQUALI, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo.* 2nd ed. Florence, 1952, p. 449-457 (quoted passages on p. 451 and 457). On the revision of letters in Antiquity, see PETER, *Brief,* p. 156, and SYKUTRIS, *Epistolographie,* col. 198. Pasquali especially studied the revision by Petrarch of his letters, on which see V. ROSSI, *Sulla formazione delle raccolte epistolari petrarchesche,* in *Annali della Cattedra petrarchesca,* 3 (1932), p. 55-73; G. BILLANOVICH, *Petrarca letterato,* 1 : *Lo scrittoio del Petrarca.* Rome. 1947. (Storia e letteratura, 16), p. 47-53; E. H. WILKINS, *On the Dates of Certain Letters,* in *The Making of the "Canzoniere" and Other Petrarchan Studies.* Rome, 1951. (Storia e letteratura, 38), p. 311-345. Petrarch's revisions have misled many scholars.

[184] See the examples cited in PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 43, n. 182, to which others could be added.

[185] J.-M. DÉCHANET, *Les divers états du texte de la Lettre aux frères de Mont-Dieu dans Charleville 114,* in *Scriptorium,* 11 (1957), p. 63-86.

[186] FAWTIER, *Ste Catherine,* vol. 2, p. 119-123.

[187] Cf. D. GORCE, *Les voyages, l'hospitalité et le port des lettres dans le monde*

---

messengers were hard to find, and unless a writer had at his disposal a number of professional couriers, who were available only at the largest courts and chanceries, he might have to wait a long time for a suitable messenger or even for a chance traveller going in the right direction. Many letters were written precisely because the opportunity presented itself in the form of a courier. Carriage was therefore inevitably slow and unreliable, and the fact that a letter was written, entered in a register, and even sent is no guarantee that it reached its destination. Many letters, also, were delivered only long after the affairs with which they were concerned had been settled.

B) *Delivery*

It is natural to assume that the task of the messenger, like that of a postman today, was simply to deliver the letter to the addressee, and such was doubtless often the case, especially with chance couriers and casual travellers to whom letters were entrusted. The inscription on the letter-seal of Henry of Glinde shows that the recipient was himself expected to receive the letter, break the seal, and read, or have it read to him (see p. 47 above). Frequently, however, the messenger in the Middle Ages, as in Antiquity, was much more than a delivery boy and acted to some extent as an envoy or ambassador, transmitting orally not only secret messages or news too dangerous to put in writing but also the text and message of the letter itself. The term *nuntius* in thirteenth-century legal sources was treated as almost the equivalent of *epistola.* 'A *nuncius*', according to Azo, 'is he who takes the place of a letter : he is just like a magpie and the voice of the principal sending him ... and he recites the words of the principal' [188].

Although it has long been known that in remote Antiquity letters originated essentially as aide-memoires for the messengers who delivered

---

chrétien des IVᵉ et Vᵉ siècles. Wépion-sur-Meuse and Paris, 1925; E. H. WILKINS, *On the Carriage of Petrarch's Letters,* in *Speculum,* 35 (1960), p. 214-223; PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 23-25. On the terminology of sending letters in Late Antiquity, see the brief note of E. WÖLFFLIN, *Dirigere litteras,* in *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik,* 4 (1887), p. 100, who showed that the term *mittere* was used until the second century at the earliest, when it was increasingly replaced, especially among Christian letter-writers, by *dirigere.* Cf. also LANHAM, *Salutatio,* p. 33-35.

[188] D. E. QUELLER, *Thirteenth-Century Diplomatic Envoys : Nuncii and Procuratores,* in *Speculum,* 35 (1960), p. 199.

their contents orally, the persistence of this oral element in western Latin epistolography has been relatively neglected by scholars. In tenth-century Byzantium, letters were assumed to have a certain publicity, and Karlsson conjectured that the use of the first person plural in a letter was intended to include those around the writer, who desired 'thus to make known to his correspondent that the latter's letters were read by an admiring public' [189]. *Legere* and *audire* were more or less synonyms in the Middle Ages, when most reading was out loud [190] and when, 'The masses of the people read by means of the ear rather than the eye, by hearing others read or recite rather than by reading to themselves' [191]. The ability of the Count Palatine Frederick in the eleventh century to read and to understand a letter himself was regarded as exceptional [192], and most laymen had to have letters read to them [193]. A passage in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole* suggests that a letter to Guillaume was not opened until some time after it had been orally delivered by the messenger [194], and even churchmen heard their letters as well as read them. 'Hearing your messengers (*nuntios*), reading your letters,...' began a letter from Peter the Venerable, who in another letter asked Nicholas of Montiéramy to read a letter to St. Bernard and to urge him to act on it [195].

The art of public speaking and the art of writing letters were therefore closely related and merged in what later came to be called diplomacy. The medieval messenger was often an envoy and the letters he carried had something of the character of diplomatic instructions, which were intended to be delivered orally. It is impossible to say how often this was the case, but it is likely that even letters considered to be private often became known to a number of people. This practice, too, may

[189] KARLSSON, *Idéologie*, p. 142.

[190] J. BALOGH, « *Voces paginarum* », in *Philologus*, 82 (1926-27), p. 207; DI CAPUA, *Scritti minori*, vol. 1, p. 6-8.

[191] R. CROSBY, *Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages*, in *Speculum*, 11 (1936), p. 88.

[192] MGH, *Scriptores* in-fol., vol. 10, p. 148. Cf. EBO, *Vita Ottonis*, I, 6. Ed. P. JAFFÉ, *Bibliotheca rerum germanicarum*. Vol. 4, Berlin, 1869, p. 594 : 'Erat enim imperator [Henry IV] litteris usque adeo imbutus, ut cartas, a quibuslibet sibi directas, per semet ipsum legere et intelligere prevaleret'.

[193] H. GRUNDMANN, *Litteratus-Illitteratus*, in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 40 (1958), p. 45-46.

[194] JEAN RENART, *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*. Ed. F. LECOY, Paris, 1962. (Classiques français du moyen âge, 91), p. 28-29 (lines 868 ff.). Cf. WATTENBACH, *Schriftwesen*, p. 202.

[195] PETER THE VENERABLE, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 5 (Ep. 2) and 372 (Ep. 151); cf. vol. 2, p. 27. Cf. CROSBY, *Oral Delivery*, p. 99, on the formula 'read and hear'.

account for the fact, which is sometimes otherwise hard to explain, that original letters found their way back into the hands of the writer. The messenger may in these cases have delivered the letter orally and brought back the written text. What he actually said and whether he delivered the text of the letter verbatim is naturally not known.

4. PRESERVATION

A) *Originals*

The originals of medieval letters were rarely preserved [196], and those that exist (see p. 47 above) usually owe their survival as much to chance as to design. Although the letter-seal cited above instructed the recipient of a letter to close, replace, and preserve it after it had been read, very few medieval letters were kept for any length of time. Being in themselves, unlike charters, of no evidentiary or legal value, letters were better preserved in copies than in the original form.

B) *Isolated Copies*

A certain number of letters have survived separately in association with other works, in non-epistolary collections, such as cartularies, and in odd copies, as on the fly-leaves of manuscripts and in palimpsests, like the letter from Charlemagne to Pope Hadrian, which survives in what is apparently a contemporary copy (exemplar, *Urabschrift*) made at Reichenau at the same time as the original (charta autentica, *Urschrift*) was sent to Rome [197]. Discounting epistolary prefaces and letters of dedication, which form a distinctive sub-genre, both real and fictional letters are found imbedded either as part of the narrative or by way of *pièces justificatives* in historical and other types of works, like those of Flodoard, Widukind, and Gerhoh of Reichersberg [198]. Like the speeches found in parallel circumstances, such texts must be treated with caution, since they were designed to meet a certain need and were often adapted or even fabricated accordingly. Likewise letters in cartularies usually

[196] Cf. LANGLOIS, *Formulaires* [1], in *Notices*, 34.1 (1891), p. 3; HOFFMANN, *Zur mittelalterlichen Brieftechnik*, p. 147.

[197] E. MUNDING, *Königsbrief Karls d. Gr. an Papst Hadrian über Abt-Bischof Waldo von Reichenau-Pavia*. Beuron, 1920. (Texte und Arbeiten herausgeb. durch die Erzabtei Beuron, I, 6), p. 21, who calls the letter a *Briefurkunde* and dates it 781/95, probably 791.

[198] NÜRNBERGER, *Glaubwürdigkeit*; CLASSEN, *Aus der Werkstatt Gerhochs*, p. 35-38.

have a special reason for being there, like the letter to Countess Otgiva from Abbot Othelbold of St. Bavo at Ghent, which is preserved in the cartulary of that abbey and is essentially a list of relics and associated properties, and the forged letter from Pope Gregory VII to Hugh of Die in the cartulary of St. Vincent at Mâcon, which was fabricated to support the case of the bishop of Mâcon against the abbey of Cluny [199].

C) *Collections*

The vast majority of medieval letters survive in collections and owe their preservation to the fact that they were sufficiently valued at the time they were written to be kept together with other letters. If no copy was made at that time, either by the writer or the recipient, the chances were against the preservation of the text. Only about half the letters even of a famous writer like St. Bernard has survived [200], and many entire correspondences have vanished [201]. The way in which these collections were formed is therefore an important part of medieval epistolography and has attracted the attention of scholars, especially in Germany, for about fifty years. Much work remains to be done, however, and no more than a survey of the *status quaestionis* can be given here.

Aside from those collections of letters which were kept for basically business or legal purposes, or as administrative records, like letter-books in late medieval monasteries, it is possible to distinguish three basic types of medieval letter-collections, which may be called archival (or casual), didactic, and literary (or planned). The first two types do not require extensive discussion here. The archival collections were in effect accumulations, often including official as well as personal letters, such as the Abinnaeus archive, which consists of the miscellaneous papers of a Roman army officer of the mid-fourth century, the twelfth-century Milanese collection cited above, of which the precise origin (including, as it does, many original letters apparently recovered by the writer, or

[199] L. VOET, *De Brief van Abt Othelbold aan gravin Otgiva, over de relikwieën en het domein van de Sint-Baafsabdij te Gent (1019-1030)*. Brussels, 1949. (Académie royale de Belgique. Commission royale d'histoire); and H. E. J. COWDREY, *The Epistolae vagantes of Pope Gregory VII*. Oxford, 1972. (Oxford Medieval Texts), p. 154-155.

[200] LECLERCQ, *Recherches*, p. 205.

[201] All of the letters of Aelred of Rievaulx, for instance, are lost : A. HOSTE, *Biblio-theca Aelrediana*. The Hague and Steenbrugge, 1962. (Instrumenta patristica, 2), p. 15 and 137-139.

not ever sent) is obscure, and above all the great Stonor and Paston collections, which were really family archives rather than letter-collections in any literary sense of the term. Didactic collections include formularies and collections of model letters of which the purpose was to instruct in the art of letter-writing. They often were made up of real as well as of fictional letters, and no doubt collections of real letters, such as letter-books, were used as formularies. But the plan and purpose of a formulary, as well as the type of letters it includes, is as a rule different from that both of business and of literary collections, though the line between them is not always clear. The collections of some of the great thirteenth-century *dictatores*, for instance, which combine official and unofficial letters, are both didactic and literary, as is that of Richard de Bury [202]; but even these differ in many respects from the type of planned literary collections which have attracted the most attention from scholars [203].

The discussion has concentrated around four principal questions. (1) Who made the collections? Here the main points at issue are whether they were put together by the writer of the letters himself, or his secretary, or by an outside or later compiler working either from records left by the writer or from materials gathered from the recipients of the letters. (2) How were the letters kept before being collected? Above all, were they kept in a copy-book into which the letters were entered progressively as they were written or were they kept loose? And were they kept as preliminary notes, finished drafts, copies from the letters as they were sent, or as originals either brought back by the messenger or recovered later from the recipient? (3) What were the principles governing the decision to keep a letter at the time it was written and later to include it in a collection? (4) How were the letters arranged in collections?

[202] Cf. BRESSLAU, *Handbuch*, vol. 2, p. 253, n. 2, on the distinction between formularies and letter-books; W. A. PANTIN, *English Monastic Letter-Books*, in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*. Ed. J. G. EDWARDS, V. H. GALBRAITH, and E. F. JACOB. Manchester, 1933, p. 201, defining a letter-book, as distinct from a cartulary or act-book, as 'essentially a record, kept chronologically, of letters and other documents issued by the abbot'; DENHOLM-YOUNG, *Liber Epistolaris*, p. xxv, suggested that such works should be classified 'as official or unofficial, and within these categories as formularies or chronological letter-books'.

[203] Among the collections which have been most studied are those of Gerbert (by L. HAVET, K. PIVEC, F. WEIGLE, M. UHLIRZ) and Wibald (by H. ZATSCHEK, B. SCHMEIDLER) and the Tegernsee collection (K. STRECKER, B. SCHMEIDLER, C. ERDMANN, O. MEYER, K. LANGOSCH, H. PLECHL).

If they derived from a letter-book kept by a single writer, and their order was not purposely changed, they would naturally be in chronological order. If they were kept loose, or recovered subsequently, their arrangement would either be more-or-less random or that imposed upon them by the compiler.

Bernhard Schmeidler was the principal protagonist of the view that medieval letter-collections reflect a unity based upon the personality of the writer. He wrote in 1949 that : 'Since the year 1926, I have stood for the idea that any large collection of early medieval letters that has some unity in time of origin, unity or at least homogeneity of content, and unity of manuscript tradition also goes back to the unity of a single writer personality and can be understood and explained only by the personal collecting activity of the writer' [204]. For Schmeidler, therefore, the collecting of letters was, as he put it, 'a sort of register-keeping by private persons', and in an earlier article he explained that : 'The majority of surviving medieval letters are preserved in collections which go back more or less directly to the issuer : not to the issuer who is often named in the addresses, which may vary greatly in the same collection, but to the man who drew them up, the *dictator*. For the preservation of medieval letters the *dictator* in question must have kept a regular and carefully maintained letter-book, and this must have been preserved in whole or in part. It follows that many more letters were written than have been preserved' [205].

The personal unity of the letter-collection is therefore principally shown, according to Schmeidler, by its stylistic consistency and chronological order, and he applied these rules to a number of collections, including those of Gerbert, Froumund of Tegernsee, Hildegard of Bingen, and Abelard and Heloise, which he argued was written by Abelard alone. In some respects he applied his rules too rigidly, and his conclusions have not been fully accepted by many scholars; but the questions he raised and answers he proposed marked an important contribution to the study of medieval epistolography.

Recent research on individual letter-collections suggests that there were in fact no general rules governing the compilation of collections and that examples can be found to illustrate almost all the alternatives

---

[204] B. SCHMEIDLER, *Die Briefsammlung Froumunds von Tegernsee*, in *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 62-69 (1949), p. 200-201.

[205] B. SCHMEIDLER, *Kaiser Heinrich IV. und seine Helfer im Investiturstreit.* Leipzig, 1927, p. 344.

and combinations of alternatives in the questions cited above. Some indeed were formed by an individual *dictator* on the basis of a copy-book and show therefore the stylistic unity and chronological order posited by Schmeidler, but many others include letters which were clearly not written by a single writer, even under several names, including replies and exchanges of letters between writers, fictional as well as real letters, and sometimes also other types of works which would have no place in a letter-book. The great St. Victor collection, which Luchaire called 'one of the most important collections of historical texts which has been transmitted to us from the Middle Ages', incorporated whole collections as well as individual letters from various sources [206]. Among other of the great twelfth-century collections gathering together letters by various writers concerning particular issues or places were the Tegernsee, Admont, and Becket collections, and the Codex Udalrici, of which even Schmeidler recognized the special character. Some collections were formed progressively, while others were put together subsequently from various sources. Likewise it is clear that whereas some writers, throughout the Middle Ages, kept drafts, minutes, or copies of their letters either in a copy-book, register, or an archive, others did not do so and had either to request the return of the originals or to gather together copies later as best they could [207]. The collection of James of Vitry appears to go back to the originals of the letters as they were received and not to any copies kept by James himself [208]. Thus each register must be examined and asses-

---

[206] A. LUCHAIRE, *Études sur quelques manuscrits de Rome et de Paris.* Paris, 1899. (Université de Paris : Bibliothèque de la Faculté des Lettres, 8), p. 31-79; N. M. HÄRING, *Hilary of Orléans and his Letter Collection*, in *Studi Medievali*, 3rd S., 14 (1973) 1069-1122.

[207] F. HEFELE, « *Reddite litteras* » : *Ein Beitrag zur Urkundenlehre*, in *Aus Verfassungs- und Landesgeschichte : Festschrift ... Theodor Mayer.* Vol. 2, Constance, 1955, p. 425-434. Osbert of Clare in one letter asked the addressee to return the letter if he could not carry out its request and to keep it if he could : E. W. WILLIAMSON, *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster.* Oxford, 1929, p. 100. Still in the early nineteenth century the banker Dawson Turner had his children return to him for safe-keeping all his own letters and those addressed to each other : M. ALLEN, *Palgrave of Arabia.* London, 1972, p. 29.

[208] R. B. C. HUYGENS, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry (1160/70-1240) évêque de Saint-Jean-d'Acre.* Leiden, 1960, p. 37-47. The letter-collection of St. Catherine of Siena was also formed by recovering the originals from the addressees : FAWTIER, *Ste Catherine*, vol. 2, p. 109-110. Cf. ERDMANN, *Untersuchungen*, p. 234-235, who strongly supports *Empfänger-Briefüberlieferung* as contrasted with *Konzept-* or *Kanzleiüberlieferung*.

sed individually in order to establish by whom, when, and how it was put together.

The character of the individual letters in a collection depends to some extent on the character of the collection as a whole, which was regarded as a work of literature in itself and often planned as such. Each letter was thus written — and revised — with an eye not only on its own future but also on its place in a possible future collection. The basis upon which the selection of letters was made is unclear and doubtless varied from writer to writer, but two general points, aside from the consciously literary character of many collections, can be made. (1) The letters were as a rule not kept or recovered on account of their practical importance or historical content so much as for their stylistic elegance or moral value and, sometimes, for the importance or celebrity of the writers. Bernard's collection was put together, according to Leclercq, out of his newest, most personal, and most beautiful letters [209]. (2) The collection was put together, like a *florilegium* (with which letter-collections were sometimes compared), in such a way as to achieve a pleasing variety of subject-matter and style [210]. The author of an unpublished letter-collection from St. Albans described this when he wrote that, 'The words of utility and pleasure in these letters constitute a harmony of writings in which both the indolent can be studious and the bored can be refreshed. For variety is the refreshment of man and constant care and concentration on a single thing provokes boredom' [211]. The constant rearrangement by some compilers of the selection and order of the letters in their collections was often a factor that contributed to the confusion of the manuscript tradition. No two manuscripts of the letter-collection of Peter of Blois, for instance, are arranged in precisely the same way [212]. Others sought to

[209] LECLERCQ, *Recherches*, p. 216. Cf. MOREY and BROOKE, *Letters of Gilbert Foliot*, p. 13.

[210] SYKUTRIS, *Epistolographie*, col. 188-189, with particular reference to the collections of Pliny and Sidonius.

[211] Dublin, Trinity College, 184 (B.2.17), f° 158ᵛ : 'Sunt namque inter has epistolas cuiuscumque utilitatis uel delectationis uerba conuenientia scriptis, in quibus et studere poterit desidiosus et recreari fastidiosus. Rei enim uariatio hominis est recreatio : fastidium prouocat assidua sollicitudo et unius rei continua supersessio'. I owe this reference to my friend Prof. Marvin Colker, of the University of Virginia, whose edition of these letters will soon be published. See Marvin L. COLKER, *Analecta Dublinensia*. Cambridge (Mass.), 1975. (Mediaeval Academy of America Publcation No. 82), p. 152.

[212] E. S. COHN, *The Manuscript Evidence for the Letters of Peter of Blois*, in *The*

achieve variety by inserting into the collections other types of works, such as poems, short treatises, and sermons, which have sometimes been omitted by later scribes and editors but which formed an authentic part of the collection as it was originally conceived [213].

An interesting description of the way a letter-collection was formed is found in the introductory letter to the collection of Abbot Gervase of Prémontré, addressed by his secretary Hugh to the canon Simon of St. Eloi-Fontaine :

> I was often summoned by my most revered and dear father Lord Gervase ... to write down in his presence the letters which he composed (*dictabat*); for, as you know, I was accustomed to the practice of writing (*scribendi usum*) from childhood. I relished these letters, albeit incapable of discriminating between them, and I heard from several people that many commended my abbot for his style of speech and of letter-writing (*dictandi*). For these reasons I have put together some letters composed (*dictatas*) by him and written by me, and some others which were before my time and which I lately found thrown aside; so that just as he was the pious teacher and kindly instructor of my youth, so I, if God grant it, might be his humble and diligent imitator both in my way of life and in art of letter-writing (*dictandi scientia*).

Hugh then went on to say that he was sending with the collection two treatises on *dictamen* which Gervase had obtained for him and to express the hope that Simon would not be bored. He then continued :

> You must know, however, that I have thought fit to slip into this little book some letters sent to my abbot, not so much because their style was elegant as because their senders were important. Therefore I beg you ... treat carefully this collection which several people have already seen (who, having read it in part, wish to read it through and perhaps transcribe it); keep it properly and return it soon. ... Farewell, excellent brother, and may these works I send you so work on the mind of the reader that they will be found to have brought profit to his soul, since, when you are engrossed in them, you will forget the world you have forsaken [214].

English Historical Review, 41 (1926), p. 43-60, and the unpublished thesis on the letters of Peter of Blois by the late E. C. HIGONNET in the Harvard University Library.

[213] ERDMANN, *Briefliteratur*, p. 9 (on the collection of Geoffrey of Vendôme); J. LECLERCQ, *Genre*, p. 68. A good example of this type of mixed collection is that studied by A. WILMART, *Les mélanges de Mathieu préchantre de Rievaulx au début du XIIIe siècle*, in *Revue bénédictine*, 52 (1940), p. 15-84.

[214] C. R. CHENEY, *Gervase, Abbot of Prémontré : A Medieval Letter-Writer*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 33 (1950-51), p. 29-30, upon whose translation the present one is based.

This description applies only to this particular collection, but it throws light on many general questions, including how letters were written and preserved, how the collection was put together (out of letters written by the compiler, earlier letters found 'thrown aside', and some outside letters) and circulated (apparently in an incomplete form before the final collection was made), and the stylistic and moral purpose of the collection in the view of the compiler.

This letter also illustrates the problem of arrangement, since the letters written by Hugh himself were probably preserved chronologically in a letter-book but the earlier letters and those sent to Gervase must have been inserted as the compiler thought best. The arrangement of letter-collections in Antiquity is a subject of disagreement among scholars, some of whom argue that the order is basically chronological except when it was purposely altered and others holding that chronology was normally sacrificed to the principle of *varietas* [215]. In the Middle Ages it is clear that both principles prevailed. Schmeidler naturally argued that the order was chronological insofar as the collection was based upon a letter-book into which copies of the letters were inserted as they were written [216], but he himself admitted that there were enough exceptions to show that no firm rule can be applied to all collections. Recent research suggests that it was not infrequent for letters which had originally been chronologically arranged to be regrouped according to subject and recipient into groups within which some elements of chronological order remain [217]. Whatever the arrangement, however, the editor and historian will be wise to heed the advice of Erdmann that, 'When the manuscripts present fixed bodies [of letters] the sequence should be left undisturbed as an important aspect of the textual tradition' [218].

---

[215] Peter, *Brief*, p. 157; Sykutris, *Epistolographie*, col. 199.

[216] See especially Erdmann, *Die Briefe Meinhards*, p. 340, summarizing the arguments of Schmeidler.

[217] Examples of such arrangement are the collections of Lupus of Ferrières. Ed. and tr. L. Levillain. Vol. 1, Paris, 1927. (Classiques de l'histoire de France au moyen âge, 10), p. xii, and of Bernard (Leclercq, *Recherches*, p. 212-215).

[218] Erdmann, *Die Briefe Meinhards*, p. 385. According to Marti, *L'epistolario*, p. 207, who is concerned particularly with humanist letter-collections, 'L'edizione di un "epistolario", dunque, non dovrebbe trasgredire la coscienza d'arte e gl'intendimenti retorici del suo autore; ogni "epistolario" dovrebbe essere pubblicato così come fu concepito e ordinato'.

CHAPTER IV

EDITIONS

It is impossible to list here, even in summary, all the editions of medieval letters and letter-collections which are either now available or in the course of preparation. Among new editions cited above which have appeared since the Second World War, however, may be mentioned the letters of Desiderius of Cahors (n. 82), Ratherius of Verona (n. 86), Gerbert (n. 34), Peter the Venerable (n. 5), Gilbert Foliot (n. 113), James of Vitry (n. 208), Richard of Bury (n. 115), Jean de Montreuil (n. 34), and the Cely letters (n. 129), to which may be added the editions of the letters of Anselm by F. S. Schmitt, Guido of Bazoches by H. Adolfsson, and Adam of Perseigne by L. Bouvet. Editions are in progress, furthermore, of the letters of Ivo of Chartres (n. 34), Bernard of Clairvaux (n. 41), John of Salisbury by W. J. Millor and C. N. L. Brooke, and the Paston family (n. 129), and are planned of the letters of Fulbert of Chartres by F. Behrends, Peter Damiani by K. Reindl, Lanfranc by M. Gibson, and Abelard and Heloise by D. Luscombe. Many of the greatest medieval collections of letters, however, such as that of Peter of Blois and the St. Victor collection, are available only in old editions, and others, like that of Alan of Tewkesbury, are still in manuscript; and there is still truth in the view of Erdman cited above that all post-Carolingian letter-collections need to be re-edited in the light of how letters were written and collected, since the editing of letters presents special problems.

1. Individual Letters

The editor should attempt to establish insofar as possible which version or versions of the text (preliminary notes, drafts, copies) are preserved in the manuscripts and, for real letters, the relation of this version to the letter as it was sent. In this regard letters need to be treated with perhaps even greater caution than other types of texts, since each version may have a legitimate claim to authenticity and may represent a distinct stage, with an historical value of its own, in the development of the text. The practice at present with regard to editing modern letters

is to preserve with the utmost scrupulosity the text of the letter as it was written. 'Whether it is a matter of an ancient or of a modern text', wrote Guisan in a recent symposium on editions of correspondences, 'it seems to me that the editor should take no liberty with the text. If there is an error of orthography, out of forgetfulness or out of fatigue, even this error should be reproduced' [219]. This principle applies particularly to letters which are preserved in the autograph and is designed to keep to the greatest possible extent in the printed text the spontaneous and intimate character of modern letters. It is less well suited to medieval letters, of which the originals only rarely survive, and not at all to texts where many copies lie between the original version and the existing manuscripts. Many medieval letters are found, however, in manuscripts which were prepared either by or under the direct supervision of the writer, and with these great caution should be exercised in emending the text [220], and particular attention given to Pasquali's point that the way letters were written, sent out, and preserved in the Middle Ages was particularly favorable to the formation and preservation of author's variants and that differences between various versions may be the result of changes and revisions by the author at different stages in the history of the text.

The decision concerning which version is preferable will depend to a certain extent upon the editor's own view of the character of the texts he is editing. If the letter is seen, as most letters were in the Middle Ages, as a conscious literary product, then the subsequent revisions will tend to appear more legitimate and the final version may be considered the most authentic. If on the other hand, the letter is seen, as today, as an intimate and spontaneous expression of the author's ideas and feelings, then the earliest version as actually sent is likely to be preferred.

---

[219] *Les éditions de correspondances : Colloque 20 avril 1968.* Paris, 1968, p. 69; cf. also 70-71. On the editing of eighteenth-century letters, see Robert HALSBAND, *Editing the Letters of Letter-Writers*, in *Studies in Bibliography*, 11 (1958), p. 25-37, who advocates the expansion of abbreviations and addition of punctuation and capital letters at the beginning of sentences but the retention in all other respects of the exact spelling and capitalization of the original.

[220] K. LANGOSCH, *Geschichte der Textüberlieferung der antiken und mittelalterlichen Literatur : Überlieferungsgeschichte der mittelalterlichen Literatur.* Zürich, 1964, p. 22-23, stressing the difference between autograph and original.

2. COLLECTIONS

With regard to editions of letter-collections, the editor is faced with the series of questions, outlined above, concerning authorship, compilation, sources, and arrangement. From a practical point of view the most troublesome of these is likely to be arrangement, since the editor must decide whether to print the letters in the order found in the manuscripts (or in a manuscript) or to rearrange them as best he can in terms of chronology, subject-matter, or recipient, This problem is illustrated by the letter-collection of Petrus de Vinea, for which the choices facing the editor, according to Schaller, are (1) to edit all the letters in chronological order insofar as it can be established, (2) to try to reconstruct the archetype of the so-called ordered collection, or (3) to print the most important redaction of the collection in its surviving form as found in the manuscripts [221]. No one of these solutions is fully satisfactory, as Schaller is aware, and they illustrate the difficulties facing the editor of a collection with a complicated text-history.

---

[221] SCHALLER, *Entstehung*, p. 157-158; cf. his *Studien*, p. 404-412, on the collection of Thomas of Capua, which presents parallel problems.

CHAPTER V

HISTORICAL VALUE OF LETTERS

'It will be admitted without difficulty, I think', wrote Langlois at the beginning of his classic series of articles on medieval formularies, 'that the most precious documents for the history of the Middle Ages are letters, missive letters, both official and private correspondences' [222]. This statement may at first sight appear somewhat exaggerated, but in fact it is hard to think of any other single type of source which sheds so much light on medieval history. The very breadth and adaptability of the genre suited it to touch upon almost every possible aspect of life and thought in the Middle Ages. Though he was writing about formularies, Langlois was referring principally to what I have here called real letters, and historians have been more inclined to overlook the value of fictional letters, which have been less used, according to Haskins, precisely owing to the difficulty of distinguishing the real from the fictional [223]. Model letters often deal with practical, everyday matters of a type rarely mentioned in surviving missive letters, and this in itself gives them a value especially to social historians. Their usefulness to contemporaries depended precisely on the fact that they reflected real conditions of life and could be adapted to suit a wide variety of actual situations. To them these letters were therefore probably no less authentic than those which were actually sent. Fictional letters as well as real letters constitute a vast, and in some respects still unexplored, source for the study of medieval history.

ANNEXE

aux pages 29 et 35-36

See now, on rhythmical prose and the *cursus*, TORE JANSON, *Prose Rhythm in Medieval Latin from the 9th to the 13th Century*. (Stockholmiensia, 20), who, among other points, throws doubt (p. 96-97) on the attribution to Peter of Blois of the treatise cited on p. 35.

[222] LANGLOIS, *Formulaires* [1], in *Notices*, 34.1, p. 1.
[223] HASKINS, *Studies*, p. 4.